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Social Science in Government

Evaluation of the Industry Placements Pilot

Research report

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The Institute for Employment Studies

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Glossary

EYFS	EYFS is the Early Years Foundation Stage which sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old in England. All schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers must follow the EYFS ¹ .
Industry placement	<p>An industry placement describes the 45-60 day experience with an employer that all learners will have when T Level programmes are introduced.</p> <p>The same term is applied to placements in the pilot phase, although these were of 40+ day duration.</p>
Work experience	Work experience may be delivered in schools in the pre-16 phase, and by all types of post-16 provider. Typically work experience comprises learners spending 1 or 2 weeks with an employer gaining a taste of the workplace and developing soft skills and employability attributes.
Work experience coordinator	In the pilot the providers continued the use of established terminology, referring to work experience coordinators rather than industry placement coordinators. This terminology is used throughout the report to reflect their conceptualisation.
CDF	The Capacity and Delivery Fund is supporting more providers to test industry placements ahead of full roll-out within T Level programmes.

¹ UK Government website, accessed 21st November 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/early-years-foundation-stage>

Summary

The Industry Placements Pilot Programme was introduced as part of government aims to reform and strengthen technical education in England. Industry placements will be an integral part of the new T Level programmes which will help learners taking classroom-based qualifications gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise. Within the T Level programmes, placements will be of 45-60 working day duration and will offer a structured learning experience. The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned 21 providers to test a set of new placement design dimensions:

- The model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release
- The preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or a national level organisation
- The monitoring and management of placements – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

The aim of this research project was to provide independent external, process evaluation of the Industry Placements Pilot Programme. The primary research took place over 3 waves, with a 4th phase dedicated to detailed thematic analysis of the data captured and dissemination of the lessons that could be learned. The aim of the evaluation was to:

- Assess the effectiveness of different placement and support models in different contexts
- Provide evidence on implementation highlighting lessons for full, national roll-out.

The research was based on qualitative interviews with key stakeholders in the Pilot Programme. This included interviews across 3 waves with a range of staff in all 21 providers and staff at the national brokerage and support organisation. Employers and learners were also interviewed. In addition, management information was analysed and a survey of learners undertaken. Providers were also engaged in a series of webinars, online forums and learning events throughout all waves.

There are some implications of the research approach. Qualitative research draws out deep insights however, because questions are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, it is not possible to provide a quantification of views. Moreover, findings are based on the various respondents' perceptions and experiences and cannot be taken as representative of all providers, employers and learners. As such, it is not possible to make definitive statements about, for example, which placement models worked best for different industries, although it is possible to discuss the factors that meant some of the models worked well in particular settings.

High level themes

Resources and infrastructure

The evidence showed that, throughout the pilot, providers adapted existing work experience resourcing to support the placements, and further changes were planned in preparation for operating placements with the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) years. Adaptations to existing resources included introducing new roles, expanding the number and types of staff with responsibilities for placements, focusing on brokerage and learner support; all of which were intended to respond to challenges encountered.

Some aspects of work that were strengthened as time went on included ensuring work experience coordinators² were available in all curriculum areas and setting in place committees to share and disseminate learning across the institution.

Nonetheless, there were demands from employers and learners for increased support. Employers wanted clear communications throughout the process, including more contact on learner progress and support. Employers also needed time and/or support to ensure their resources were set in place appropriately. Learners indicated that they would welcome more consistent monitoring and follow-up particularly on the content of placements and skills being gained.

Providers believed intensifying monitoring requirements on their staff would not be sustainable but believed technology-facilitated solutions including customer relationship management (CRM) packages would be part of the solution.

Employer engagement and brokerage

Placements were sourced by providers, the external brokers (the national brokerage and support organisation and by external brokers commissioned by a local solutions pilot providers) and in some cases, by learners themselves. Various challenges were encountered determined by traditions of placements within different industries, employer size and peak periods in the business cycle.

The evidence suggested that brokerage messages should be tailored to the employer. Large employers responded positively to messages about 'giving something back' to young people. Smaller employers liked the concept of an additional resource to create

² The providers continued the use of established roles, and referred to work experience coordinators rather than industry placement coordinators. Their terminology is used throughout the report to reflect their conceptualisation.

additional capacity in their businesses. In industries with skills gaps, such as catering, the opportunity to develop a 'talent pipeline' was a pertinent message.

While attributable to the pilot phase and short implementation timeframe, employers often found the recruitment and selection procedures to be rushed. For future operations, many said they would prefer to have early insight into the learner they would work with and their course curriculum. Similarly, providers thought an earlier start would be valuable and allow time to get to know about the work environment to ensure appropriate matching, in particular for SEND learners.

Models

As noted, the pilot aimed to test 3 placement models: day release, block release and mixed days and blocks. Providers increasingly moved to delivering multiple models of placements to meet employers' and learners' needs. There was also a significant shift towards mixed models by the end of the pilot, in response to employers' needs, combined with the demands of the curriculum - including course work and assessment/examination timetables. In addition, some providers and employers worked together to create placements based on 'live briefs'.

Block placements were, overall, difficult for providers to operationalise. However, when day release occurred on different days even within the same course this led to disruption to curriculum planning, although the need for learners to attend maths and English resits was also an influence on this.

The employers made the models of placements that were offered to them 'work' and they could see both the benefit of immersive experiences as part of a block, and the development over time gained through day release. It was harder to discern learner preferences for particular models, but their feedback indicated that placements should be scheduled to respond to their course requirements – including course work and assessment schedules – as well as paid work and/or caring commitments.

While the research approach means it is not possible to state categorically which models worked best in which industries, employers and providers indicated some factors that affected preferences.

- **Agriculture, animal care and the environment.** Some agricultural employers preferred learners to be available at busy times e.g. harvest; for these, block or mixed models worked well. In some animal care settings, employers preferred day release and mixed models. Some employers wanted the flexibility to permit placements to continue into evenings and weekends.

- **Business and administration.** Many employers found a mixed model with an opening block to cover induction and set the learners' expectations worked well. Block models suited project-based placements. Day release allowed learners to hone technical skills through repeated tasks.
- **Catering and hospitality.** As catering involves similar tasks on any given day, both block and day release models proved workable. Flexible timings were essential including evenings and weekend shifts and to cover the Christmas/New Year and summer peaks.
- **Education and Childcare.** Work experience is embedded in existing qualifications and day release was familiar and allowed a well-structured placement. Some employers preferred a block model as learners gained a realistic picture of physical, 'full-on' work.
- **Construction.** Initial blocks allowed learners to 'settle in'. Two consecutive days release provided continuity and skills development. Where tasks required training, block models reduced the need for refreshers. Placements timed for the autumn-to-spring period worked well.
- **Creative and design.** Project-based work lent itself to blocks, but repeated tasks aligned better with a day release model. Due to the high proportion of micro employers, there was a need for flexible timings and some employers were reluctant to offer placements of more than 20 days.
- **Digital.** Mixed models with an opening block worked well for digital freelancers renting desk space on specific days. Employers delivering projects preferred learners to work on a block model although some small employers said hosting learners on blocks was too time-consuming.
- **Engineering and manufacturing.** Block models were preferred for projects but small employers found supervising learners on blocks reduced productivity. Day release worked well when skills could be repeatedly practised. For complex tasks a 1-day release model was not well matched.
- **Hair and beauty.** Mixed models with an opening block worked well. Day release was suitable for frequently repeated activities. Two- days' release, following classroom sessions allowed learners to build links between learning and practice. Flexibility needed to cover evenings, weekends, and the busy periods.
- **Health and science.** In the science and health pathways blocks enabled learners to contribute to long-running tasks, but shorter repeated tasks suited day release. Flexible timings were important for health employers who wanted learners to be available during the busy winter season.
- **Legal, finance and accountancy.** Some micro employers said blocks were unfeasible due to insufficient work over longer periods. Small employers found it

too demanding to have learners on site for 2 days, but other employers thought 2 days was the minimum needed to develop industry insights and technical skills.

Routes and pathways

The technical education routes can be grouped into: those that have a track record of delivering work experience (including longer term placements), where the pilot did better in respect of sourcing - agriculture, environment and animal care, catering and hospitality, Education and Childcare, and hair and beauty; and those where prevalence of self-employment or freelancers made it tricky to operate industry placements – construction, creative and design, and digital.

Other routes where it proved difficult to source placements of a suitable quality included some pathways in health and science, and legal, finance and accounting. For the engineering and manufacturing route the picture is mixed, with some health and safety concerns leading to difficulty in delivering technical content. The business and administration route was mostly straightforward due to the range of potential employers where placements could be sourced, although because of the breadth of industrial settings in this route learners did not always have clear occupational aspirations, which sometimes made matching difficult.

Pilot funding was used to help learners to access their placements, including transport during unsociable hours, and providing specialist clothing and equipment. Equipment and clothing were particular issues in specific occupations e.g. catering, and construction.

Learner preparation and experience

Learner preparation activities led by providers and the national support organisation focused on: building learner motivation and commitment to the placement; developing workplace and soft skills; developing technical skills and knowledge to ensure learners' expectations were aligned with the realities of workplaces; and developing job-searching skills by practicing CVs, application forms and interviews.

This preparation could be generic across routes and pathways but providers believed there was value to tailoring the technical skills preparation to particular work contexts. This could involve using scenarios based on work in the industry of the placement, and in some cases, employers came in to lead aspects of preparation. Providers' learner preparation as critical to ensure that learners understood the benefits of placement as well as their responsibilities in respect of attendance and workplace behaviours.

Industry-tailored preparation covered the types of activities that learners could be expected to undertake in the workplace as well as the sorts of situations they might face, and in some cases, input on what tasks were appropriate for someone of their age to

undertake. There was also value to clarifying during preparation who learners should contact if they could not attend the placement or if something happened on placement that they needed support on.

Before they started their placements, some learners were concerned that the industry placement could affect their college work, paid work and personal commitments. They also indicated that they wanted to understand the relevance of the placement to their future ambitions. Despite these initial concerns, many learners recalled positively the placement preparation activities, which included support to apply to the placements.

Delivery and content

There were differences in the balance between technical and soft skill development in the pilot placements which could reflect what employers believed was possible within the timeframe of the placement and the extent to which health and safety or data protection limited the opportunity for learners to get involved in more technical aspects of work. Learners felt frustrated if there were restrictions on the activities they could do, or if activities continued at low skill levels and became repetitive. However, overall, the evaluation findings indicated high levels of satisfaction with placement content amongst learners.

Some provider staff reported positive impacts for learners who developed additional technical skills while on placement and were able to reflect and share these in the classroom. Learners too saw technical and soft skill gains deriving from their placements which they viewed as valuable. This tended to be the case where placements were structured, and progressive in respect of learning content.

On placement support

On placement support largely took the form of learner and employer monitoring (by phone and/or by email). When learners were in the classroom curriculum staff often took the opportunity to explore and review activities that had been completed on placement to understand the progress learners were making.

The mid and end point learner reviews did not feature greatly in the commentary of the various stakeholders to the pilot. The employer and learner evidence suggested that greater use of these, as well as more consistent on placement monitoring, would be appreciated.

Additional on-placement support was provided to learners with SEND or additional support needs and existing support arrangements were continued in the workplace where possible. For example, learning support assistants could accompany these learners to their placements initially, until learners felt confident.

The evidence showed that to ensure learners benefit from the positive effects of placements, providers should provide support on: the costs and time involved in travel; and consider how placements interact with learners' part-time work and other personal commitments as well as coursework and assessment periods. The T Level programmes will be designed with industry placements as an integral part of the curriculum which is likely to mean many of these challenges will be minimised in the future.

Placement non-completion in the pilot

The non-completion of placements became an issue during the pilot although for a range of reasons, not all of which related to the pilot or placements. Placement-related reasons for non-completion tended to focus on learner dissatisfaction with placement content. Other reasons for non-completion were unrelated to the placement and included learners' concerns over balancing coursework and re-sits with the commitment to the placement, and changes in learners' personal circumstances - including dropping out of their course - that led to the placement ending prematurely. Looking forward, once the industry placements are embedded in T levels programmes, learners will be aware of the placements from the time of enrolment and providers will have more opportunity to generate appropriate placement content. This is likely to improve the placement experience for the learners and reduce non-completions.

Employers were often understanding about the placements' impacts on learners' time and some were willing to reschedule the placement to better accommodate the learners' other commitments, but this did not always prevent placements ending before completion. Employers said that they were not always informed of learners' decisions to stop attending their placements whereas they expected that providers would be in touch. Where providers kept them closing informed, employers felt well supported.

Impacts

The evidence suggested that employers and learners perceived the placements as having an impact on various factors, and generally impacts were not differentiated by route.

Broadly, employers saw the value of placements from understanding the skills and potential of learners at this level. It encouraged them to think more widely about their recruitment strategies and the talent pipeline. However, there were sometimes factors that impeded impact in employers' eyes: when employers struggled to find appropriate level tasks, where industry or work structures led to restrictions on the learner's activity, or when an employer was dissatisfied with the individual learner's performance, it appeared that the challenges predominated over perceptions of positive outcomes. However, employers' overall perceptions of benefits appeared to outweigh those of cost.

Many learners acquired and/or honed strong technical and employability skills and had the opportunity to practice and develop these. In addition, learners made wider gains which included industry and occupational insights, contacts for the future and in some cases, jobs and apprenticeships. Some learners also demonstrated increased confidence as a result of the placement, as well as a greater focus on achieving a good outcome from their course and on future career entry.

Key challenges and emerging solutions

The challenges encountered in implementing placements in existing qualifications, as well as the solutions that providers tested are discussed through the research report. The key points from each of the themes explored are summarised in this section.

Resources were used most intensively for the sourcing and brokerage of placements as well as getting learners ready to start on placement. While employers were sourced at volume, questions remain over achieving the right 'match' between employer and learner, with a consensus emerging that greater effectiveness on this would in turn lead to more successful placements.

Challenges around the models included: finding flexibility in the system to meet the needs of curriculum delivery including resits, learners' existing commitments such as caring and part-time work, and employers' needs. Over the academic year, providers (often for pragmatic reasons) increasingly adopted mixed models of placements that combined small blocks with day release. Many providers believed that mixed models will be more sustainable in future, given lessons from the pilot.

The quality of the placements in respect of the technical skills that can be acquired and practised varied across routes/pathways, sometimes due to restriction by health and safety, productivity and data protection concerns. Each route and associated pathway(s) presented unique challenges with a key message being that adaptability and flexibility alongside good communications helps to bring placement content and learners' and employers' needs into alignment.

Learner preparation included both skill development in becoming ready for the jobs market (CVs, interview skills), preparation to be active in the industry placement by having relevant certificates (health and safety, DBS³ for example), equipment and clothing. In future, providers are aiming to embed learner preparation activities earlier on in courses to allow time to deliver suitable activities. There were concerns from providers

³ Disclosure Barring Service

for economically disadvantaged learners, and some are considering if local charities can help with suitable clothing for regular working days.

In respect of the content of the placements, findings suggest that, under pilot conditions, the balance edged towards soft skills rather than technical skills on many placements although in some industries particular soft skills are seen as part of the requisite occupational skill set (e.g. networking in digital freelancing). Increasing the effectiveness of the match between employer and learner should lead to a greater emphasis on technical skills development. Employers reported that they would like more communication about the expectations for placement and how they can link to course content. While they would not wish to receive lengthy document on curriculum content, a more detailed understanding would help them to design the placement more closely to learners' college-based experiences. Learners too would like the placements to link more closely with their courses and career ambitions.

1. Introduction

The Post-16 Skills Plan (DfE 2016) set in place plans to reform and strengthen technical education in England through the introduction of new T Level programmes. The government's key aim is to ensure technical education equips young people with the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by employers to provide a strong underpinning to their successful transitions to the labour market.

T Levels will offer a classroom-based alternative to Apprenticeships. There is recognition that learners need to develop the fullest understanding of their chosen occupation in order to enter skilled employment at the end of their course and become productive as quickly as possible⁴. Apprenticeships offer this through on-the-job training; T Level programmes will offer this through a 45-60 working day structured industry placement alongside classroom-based technical education. These industry placements are intended to be very different from the work experience 'tasters' that have previously been available in the 16-19 phase which aimed to develop soft skills and employability. As part of industry placements, learners will be expected to gain demonstrable technical and vocational expertise, develop and hone their technical skills, and demonstrate expected behaviours and soft skills.

25 T Level programmes will be offered across 11 broad occupational routes. Apprenticeships will be offered alongside T Levels in these 11 routes, and will provide the means to qualify for 4 additional occupational routes. The routes and the means to achieve T Levels within them are set out in Table 1 below.

⁴ The intention is that T levels will also lead into higher education.

Table 1: Technical Education Routes

T Levels and Apprenticeship Routes	Apprenticeship-only Routes
Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care	Protective Services
Business and Administration	Sales, Marketing and Procurement
Catering and Hospitality	Care Services
Construction	Transport and Logistics
Creative and Design	
Digital	
Education and Childcare	
Engineering and Manufacturing	
Hair and Beauty	
Health and Science	
Legal, Finance and Accounting	

Source: DfE Post-16 technical education reforms: T level action plan 2017

The Department conducted a consultation between November 2017 and February 2018⁵ on the subject of the T Levels reforms. The consultation sought views on how best to implement the reforms. Employers, schools and colleges, other education providers, teacher and head teacher organisations and bodies, along with other interested parties were able to respond to the consultation. DfE held consultation events alongside the digital consultation, to allow contributions in other formats. In parallel, the occupational maps, upon which the routes and pathways are based, were consulted on by the Institute for Apprenticeships (which also oversees technical education).⁶ Responses to both consultations were published on 27th May 2018.

1.1. About the pilot

Introducing industry placements represents a major change for all key stakeholders engaged in technical education: education and training providers, learners and employers. Given the scale and complexity of this challenge (for example, understanding what effective placements look like for different routes and pathways, for different types of provider, different employers, and for different sub-groups of learners), the DfE

⁵ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/technical-education/implementation-of-t-level-programmes/> (accessed 14/05/18)

⁶ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/apprenticeships/institute-for-apprenticeships-occupational-maps/> (accessed 14/05/18)

commissioned 21 providers to test an agreed set of new placement models and understand what the implementation challenges were across the different routes. All received funding to support them in their endeavours to embed 40-60 working day industry placements into the 2017/18 academic year (although at full roll-out, the policy aim is for placements to be of a minimum of 45 working days duration). As T Level programmes are still in design, the providers were required to implement the placements within existing technical qualifications that corresponded to the technical education routes.

The Department worked with a contractor to deliver the national T Level consultation and as a result the contractor developed a set of 'design dimensions' for the pilot organisations to test. These centred on:

- The model – block release, day release, or a mixture of block and day release
- The preparation of the learner – by pilot providers or through a nationally-supplied programme
- The monitoring and management of the placement – by providers or through national level brokerage and/or project management.

As such, the majority of the providers (15 in number; known as the 'national support pilot group') were allocated support from an external national brokerage and support organisation in order to understand whether added value would arise from providing such services at a national level when the T Levels are fully implemented. However, the national brokerage and support organisation's performance during the pilot was outside the scope of this evaluation (see section 1.3 for details of the evaluation). The support available to these national support pilot providers included: the sourcing of a proportion of their placements, project management and/or a learner preparation programme although not all 15 of the providers received all forms of support.

The remaining 6 providers, the local solutions pilot group did not receive support from the national brokerage and support organisation. Instead, they had autonomy to individually arrange any brokerage or other support they required. The Department's team led communications with this group and managed directly, for example, their returns of management information (MI).

Both types of provider received grant funding to support their work, with their allocations varying depending on their implementation plans and the level of support they would receive from the national brokerage and support organisation. Grant funding was set at a maximum of £550 per learner, with some providers in rural, coastal or remote locations receiving an additional uplift to a maximum of £200 per learner.

The Department, in partnership with the national brokerage and support organisation, led negotiations with providers to establish which placement model(s) each would pilot, and in which existing qualifications. This was informed by mapping the existing qualifications offered by pilot providers to the routes shown in Table 1. Once this was established, the providers and the national brokerage and support organisation started work to implement the placements from autumn 2017.

The Department is planning for the first T Level programmes to be introduced in 2020 and recognises there needs to be further testing of the delivery of placements in the run up to this date. Hence, it has provided a new Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF), which will support a larger group of providers to start (or continue in the case of the pilot providers) to develop capacity and capability to deliver the industry placements⁷. The first tranche of funding will cover the period between April 2018 and July 2019, and further funding will be available in academic year 2019/20.

1.2. Pilot set-up in respect of routes and pathways

As noted, the Industry Placements Pilot was based around the 11 classroom-based technical routes, sub-divided into different pathways, and proxied by existing courses. In practice, the pilot covered all 11 routes, although not all the 25 T Level pathways that were configured when the pilot was commissioned⁸. Those not covered by the pilot are shown using red text in Table 2 below.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/work-placements-capacity-and-delivery-fund-from-april-2018-to-july-2019>

⁸ Since the Institute for Apprenticeship's consultation, some pathways proxied in the pilot have been confirmed for apprenticeship-only delivery, such as Sports Science.

Table 2: Routes and Pathways

Routes	Pathways
Agriculture, Environment and Animal Care	Agriculture, Land Management and Production
	Animal Care and Management
Catering and Hospitality	Catering
Education and Childcare	Education
Construction	Building Services Engineering
	Design, Surveying, and Planning
	Onsite Construction
Creative and Design	Craft and Design
	Cultural Heritage and Visitor Attractions
	Media, Broadcast and Production
Digital	Data and Digital Business Services
	Digital Support and Services
	Digital Production, Design and Development
Engineering and Manufacturing	Design, Development and Control
	Manufacturing and Process
	Maintenance, Installation and Repair
Hair and Beauty	Hair, Beauty and Aesthetics
Health and Science	Community Exercise, Fitness and Health ⁹
	Health
	Healthcare Science
	Science
Legal, Finance and Accounting	Legal
	Financial
	Accounting
Business and Administration	Human Resources
	Management and Administration

Key: Those in red were not tested in the pilot

⁹ Sports science route was used in the pilot, but has subsequently confirmed as an apprenticeship-only route

1.3. About the evaluation

In autumn 2017, the Department commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in partnership with the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) to undertake a process evaluation of the industry placements pilot. The Department required the evaluation to: a) assess the effectiveness of different industry placement and support models in different contexts; and b) to provide evidence on implementation highlighting lessons for a full, national roll-out.

The Department set out a series of associated research questions which were spread across 4 domains: models, placement support, providers and employers, and learners. In each, there was a focus on eliciting what was effective and why, including how this was achieved and value added, the challenges experienced and ways of overcoming these, and identification of good practice in how different learners can best be supported (with considerations around social mobility and overcoming gender and other occupational stereotyping). To provide context to the research, aid research tool design, and ensure the research approach was fully aligned with policy interests, an interview with DfE policy officials was completed.

To address the aims and research questions, IES designed a largely qualitative evaluation study comprising:

- Interviews with 8 national stakeholders, covering provider bodies, technical education advocates, and strategic level contacts - including the national brokerage and support organisation.
- Interviews with a range of staff in all 21 providers as part of 3 waves of primary research over the 2017/18 academic year. These involved strategic level staff, placement coordinators, and staff involved in curriculum and placement delivery.
 - In the first wave of research, those providers with autumn starts were prioritised for more detailed research. All 21 providers took part in the research and 47 staff were interviewed. In this wave, all interviews took place by telephone.
 - In wave 2, the sampling strategy focused on providing a depth of insight in 2-3 pathways within each provider, ensuring coverage of all pathways. Again, all 21 providers took part in the research. Over 111 staff were interviewed in wave 2. The bulk of interviews took place as part of case study visits, although a few mop-ups were conducted by telephone.
 - In wave 3, the wave 2 approach was replicated. 20 of the 21 providers participated in the primary research. 100 staff were interviewed. In most

cases, a visit was undertaken with telephone mop-ups as appropriate although in a couple of cases, all interviews were conducted by telephone.

- Interviews with project managers and placement brokerage staff in the national brokerage organisation across 3 rounds of research. In the first round, 7 of these staff were interviewed; in the second, 11; and, in the third, 5 staff took part in the research. This reflected the resourcing model for the national solutions pilot group.
- Interviews with employers: 160 were planned over the duration of the evaluation. Interviews commenced early in spring 2018 and continued until the end of the evaluation period. A total of 152 employer interviews were completed, with 32 of these constituting follow-up interviews.

The employers do not constitute a representative sample of the total population of employers participating in the pilot, but covered all 21 providers and all 11 routes. Almost all employers interviewed had hosted or were continuing to host learners.

The research team also attempted to engage employers who had expressed initial interest in the pilot but had decided not to go ahead but they proved hard to reach. As anticipated, this group did not respond to approaches about the research.

- Interviews with learners: 160 were planned over the spring and summer terms. The research team achieved 100 of these interviews. This under-achievement could be attributed to non-completions (as learners were to be interviewed as they neared completion of their placement) as well as GDPR concerns that led to providers either not releasing sample or releasing a sample frame that was too small to enable learner recruitment at any scale.

The learner interviews covered 52 females and 48 males and were spread over 18 of the 21 providers. All of the 11 technical routes were covered by these interviews. Most of these learners undertook a mixed model industry placement and within this, the majority experienced an opening block followed by day release.

The pilot MI did not provide information on the number of learners taking part who had special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) although during interviews provider staff the number of SEND learners was very limited, in part due to the requirement for learners to be on Level 2 or Level 3 courses. In addition, although all learners on courses in the pilot routes and pathways were in scope for the pilot, some providers did not send their full course cohort out to placement during the pilot and prioritised those learners without SEND for participation. In the qualitative research with learners, 10 declared that they had some form of SEND, representing 10% of the sample. Amongst this group, learning disabilities/difficulties and mental health conditions were most prevalent (4

learners in each of these categories), while 2 other learners had other health conditions that impacted their day-to-day lives.

- A review of learning logs. As part of their placements, learners had to keep a record of their activities and log the types of skills they believed they were developing as part of their placement. A small sample of these was reviewed by the evaluation – depending on permissions to release from learners and providers. In total 21 logs were reviewed.
- Webinars and online forums for providers in each term. All pilot providers were invited to take part in webinars and online forums facilitated by the evaluation team which provided an action research component to the evaluation. These online events were held in spring and summer terms and aimed to share:
 - In the webinars: findings from the previous phase of evaluation, including lessons learned, to check the evaluation team's understanding aligned with the lived experience of providers
 - In the forum: the emerging issues through discussions amongst the providers and surveys in differing formats, to enable providers to share lessons between themselves as well as with the evaluation team and Department.

Webinars and online forums were very well attended by providers who actively engaged in the activities within the forum.

- Learning events for providers in spring and summer terms. These events were organised and delivered in collaboration with the Department and their purpose was focused on supporting pilot delivery, ensuring lessons for delivery emerging from the national support group and local solutions group were fully understood and for providers to share lessons between themselves. The events involved presentations from the national support organisation and evaluation team, as well as providers themselves. All 3 events were well attended by providers, the policy team, the national support organisation and evaluation team members.
- Online forums and webinars for providers in the CDF year. While not a formal part of the pilot evaluation, a series of 2 online forums and webinars were held to engage providers involved in the CDF year with lessons learned from the pilot.
- Dissemination webinar planned for autumn 2018¹⁰. Once the findings contained in this synthesis report and the associated routes reports were signed off by policymakers, providers taking part in the pilot will be invited to a final webinar in

¹⁰ Some aspects of these plans are still in discussion and have not been fully agreed

order that the evaluation could share the lessons that could be derived across the piece.

In addition, the evaluation involved some quantitative elements, covering:

- A survey of learners: online, census survey in spring and summer terms. The evaluation intended that all participating learners would be invited to take part in the survey towards the end of their placement experience. Again, due to GDPR issues, providers chose different approaches to sending survey invitations to learners with some disclosing the full sample frame, and other providers choosing to send invitations and promote the survey themselves.

In total, 177 learners responded to the survey, drawn from 15 of the providers. These learners covered all 11 routes, although numbers in each varied considerably and, due to low cell counts, it is not possible to route survey findings quantitatively at the route level.

In terms of demographics:

- 57% of the responding learners were female and 40% were male; the remainder declined to give this information
- 78% were of white ethnic origin
- 14% declared that they had some form of disability
- 46% had gained between 5 and 10 GCSEs graded A*-C.
- The vast majority (91%) lived at home with family
- 86% were located in urban or built up areas
- Close to half (45%) had paid part-time jobs, 16% undertook voluntary work, and 6% were in unpaid work – the remainder either did not work or declined to say.

Half of the learner sample (50%) experienced a mixed placement model, 38% experienced day release and 12% experienced a block model placement.

- An analysis of the individualised learner record (ILR) to understand more the sector's engagement in work experience prior to the pilot's introduction. These data are not reported as there was not consistent use of the work experience marker across providers, which meant it was not possible to assess the extent of work experience pre-pilot.
- An analysis of the Grant Funding Agreements (GFA) set in place for pilot providers and a review of their quarterly financial submissions in relation to the grant funding they received. These data are not reported because it would be necessary to identify providers and attribute grant value and spending to them. In addition, grant funding levels were determined by a range of factors including differing infrastructures, different scales of pilot activity as well as differing levels of pre-pilot

experience on employer engagement that mean comparative judgements are of limited value.

- An analysis of pilot management information covering learners' and employers' experiences. The final figures available - supplied and validated by the Department - are included as relevant within this synthesis report.

1.4. Implications of the selected method

There are some implications to the research being largely qualitative in approach. Qualitative approaches draw out deep insights from a range of individuals, in this case providers', employers' and learners' experiences of implementing the pilot. However, because questions in qualitative research are not asked systematically and consistently of all interviewees, responses are not representative of all providers, employers or learners, and it is not possible to provide a quantification of, in this case, the number of providers, employers and learners holding particular views or having particular experiences. However, where necessary for understanding, some indication of scale is provided. Scale statements include: some, many and most, and statements such as 'around half'. For the most part, however, in reporting the qualitative evaluation data, the concern is to present the range of views and experiences, and explore the factors that drive these perspectives such as being part of the national support or local solutions pilot groups, or starting placements in autumn rather than spring or summer terms.

1.5. About the report

This report synthesises the evaluation evidence, building on a series of 3 interim, in-house reports supplied to the Department and taking into account findings from the thematic research into each of the 11 routes.

Chapter 2 focusses on the configuration of providers' and employers' resources and infrastructure to support the placements. Chapter 3 highlights the findings regarding employer engagement and the brokerage of the industry placements and chapter 4 explores how placements were set up.

The report then goes on to consider industry placement models and how these have evolved during the pilot (chapter 5). This leads on to chapter 6 learner preparation and emerging issues in relation to equality and diversity as well as safeguarding.

Chapter 7 explores placement content while chapter 7 focuses on delivery issues and on-placement support. Chapter 9 gathers together evidence on perceived impact from employers and learners and suggests some next steps for the CDF phase of work, with chapter 10 providing concluding thoughts.

2. Resources and infrastructure

This chapter reviews staff roles and responsibilities for the pilot, the infrastructure that underpinned it, and the relationship to existing staff structures and activities. It also explores providers' views on project management offered by the national brokerage and support organisation, and examines how far providers further developed resources and infrastructure as the pilot progressed. Finally, the lessons providers derived for resourcing – as part of the CDF and full roll-out of T Levels are captured, along with the key challenges and emerging solutions that were tested or were planned in light of these.

2.1. Staff roles and existing infrastructure

The roles providers used in the pilots could be categorised as:

- Project co-ordinator: a strategic role co-ordinating the project
- Industry placement roles: sourcing and organising placements, including employer liaison before and during placements
- Learner support roles: directly supporting learners on placement, including regular visits.

Providers took into account how the above roles fitted within their existing work-based learning infrastructure. Intuitively, they aimed to build on existing employer engagement and apprenticeships activity during the pilot, but there were contrasting approaches in doing so.

Some providers that offered apprenticeships allocated placement staff into apprenticeship teams, in order to build on the existing infrastructure and warm employer contacts. Others believed that these two aspects of their work should be kept separate, as relationships with employers for apprenticeship were too valuable to risk with a pilot project. While a best way forward did not emerge, it was apparent to providers that there needed to be some coordination internally to avoid employers being approached unknowingly by staff from different departments in their organisation. For example, a provider sited its industry placement staff within its existing business development team and allocated a single business development key contact to speak to each employer about all types of placement, to ensure strong relationships and clear communications. In another provider, a committee oversaw placements (including industry placements and work experience) across the curriculum areas, monitoring the numbers placed and the numbers outstanding, and providing a space to share intelligence, good practice and leads.

Internal coordination of employer contacts was a lesson that many providers were taking forward from the pilot into future planning. For example, a strategic lead, inspired by an

apprenticeship delivery model used by another pilot provider, hoped to use a centralised team to operate future industry placements.

2.2. Staff resourcing

Providers focused the pilot financial resources on addressing particular challenges including generating placements in sufficient numbers and supporting learners to sign up for and complete the placements.

Most providers used pilot resources to fund staff to lead sourcing and/or placement brokerage and matching. Different approaches were taken to this challenge: some asked curriculum staff to perform this role, which had mixed results – either it was not effective or where it was effective was judged to be unduly resource intensive given that curriculum staff tend to have higher salaries than, for example, industry placement coordinators. This led onto decisions to embed work experience coordinators in all curriculum areas or on all sites. For example, a provider used most of its pilot funding to recruit 7 ‘work placement coordinator’ posts, overseen by a ‘work placement manager’. Each coordinator had prior industry expertise, and was placed in the curriculum department for their subject. The coordinators and manager also met regularly as a cross-faculty team.

Other providers used work experience coordinators to lead the tasks from sourcing and brokering through to learner monitoring and support. As many work experience coordinators’ roles were part time and/or term time only, they could lack the time to provide effective support across the whole curriculum. Again, while not fully tested, this led to new thinking on resourcing models for the future. For example, a provider who trialled using resources to support 2 roles: employer-facing industry placement staff and learner-facing support staff, found that unless those with employer-facing roles had industry-specific knowledge, they could struggle. This provider was moving towards the appointment of dedicated industry tutors with strong knowledge of particular industries, located in a single vocational area. These tutors would take responsibility for generating industry placements for learners from Level 1 onwards.

2.3. Developments in resourcing as the pilot progressed

As the pilot progressed, providers had greater opportunity to consider the impacts of their organisational approaches, as well as their long-term prospects. Some recruited new/additional staff in the later stages of the pilot, including specialist industry placement

staff to cover various industries or to locate on each of their sites¹¹. Others focused on providing an infrastructure that would allow sharing of practice across the institution such as the introduction of a placements and work experience committee, to which work experience coordinators in all subject areas/departments were invited. More broadly, providers believed that a customer relationship management (CRM) system would further facilitate a more joined-up position.

2.4. Project management for the national support group

The national brokerage and support organisation delivered project management support to the 15 providers in the national support pilot group. During the autumn and winter period this focused on leading sourcing of a percentage of placements (see chapter 3), advising providers about best practice for learner matching, and capacity building for business development. By spring and into summer, most industry placements were established and the national organisation's project management focused on: monitoring completion; performance management and advice; and producing guidance materials, including curriculum planning, employer engagement and learner preparation.

Providers working with the national brokerage and support organisation were divided on the added value of the latter's involvement in project management. Some welcomed the provision of materials during the brokerage phase to 'sell' the placements to employers (as most shared some of this responsibility with the national organisation) and thought that, without the organisation's support, they would have found it more difficult to coordinate the pilots' activities with employers, learners and the Department. Having the national support organisation in place allowed providers to focus on the deeper level engagement of employers and making matches between them and the learners. Others saw limited added strategic value from having an external national project management organisation and believed that they had the infrastructure and resources to carry out this function themselves. This suggested that the extent of providers' experience in employer engagement and their confidence that existing infrastructure would be able to deliver the requisite number of placements would be crucial factors in targeting any future support of this kind.

2.5. Scaling up and internal resources

A key concern for providers was how far the infrastructure developed as part of the pilot could be implemented at a larger scale for mainstream delivery. There was growing

¹¹ It was intended that these roles support the industry placement, although providers continued to use the terminology of work experience in job titles

confidence by later stages of the evaluation that the infrastructure that the providers had invested in during the pilot would ensure continued success in delivering the T Levels.

Some providers confidently reported their plans for CDF and/or T Levels roll-out. Most planned to increase staffing and some planned to free up curriculum staff to deliver aspects of the placements. Examples included ensuring each route had an allocated industry placement coordinator, and plans to allocate tutors 'teaching remission' to enable them to liaise more fully with coordinators. Many providers believed that adding more coordinators would help solve the problem of the early stress the pilot had placed on resources. Alongside this, however, there was some uncertainty about whether the T Levels funding model would support these roles long term, which was 1 of several factors that led to consideration of technology-driven solutions and particularly customer relationship management (CRM) packages and efforts to source these.

A small number of providers held the view that staff resourcing would need to change because they were not sustainable under future funding models. For example, a provider said that they expected tutors and administrative staff to take on the tasks performed by the work experience coordinator during the pilot.

2.6. Scaling up, geography and context

Providers were aware that as industry placements became common place, sourcing could become more challenging as they and other providers covering the same geography started to 'fish in the same pool' of employers. This could be a particular concern where providers and learners sourced placements beyond usual catchment boundaries as was necessary for some industries.

While many providers were considering how to deal with this risk, a few were considering collaborations with other local providers. This included some in the national support group, where the national brokerage had sourced placement employers that they shared with other pilot providers. These providers were content to continue in these sharing arrangements although they did not necessarily foresee setting up sharing arrangements more generally. Another group of providers said they were open to collaboration with other local providers, however that they did not know how to effectively establish this. Others had made more progress: a pilot provider was taking steps to address the reluctance of large local employers, inundated by approaches from several providers, to engage with industry placements. In the future, local providers would work together to nominate key account holders who would coordinate local providers' approaches to specific large local employers, sharing the resultant placements amongst the participating providers. These key account roles would be carried out by staff from the participating providers to share the administrative load. The provider hoped that the key account roles

would reduce the risk of large employers being approached multiple times, and persuade more large employers to offer placements in the future.

Some additional considerations related to the rural location of some providers as well as the employers they worked with. This particularly affected the agriculture, environment and animal care route. With learners taking part in placements across wide geographies, the staff resource for monitoring and reviews was intensified – although solutions, such as using video-call technology for monitoring purposes, were tested and proved effective in reducing the time used on travel to placement locations. Despite the benefits of the technology, providers held the view that face-to-face meetings on employers' premises were still required.

2.7. Employer placement resourcing

During their research interviews, employers reflected on the staff time, pay, expenses and other resources they had invested in the placement versus the potential benefits they would gain. Responses indicated that employers were hoping that their investment would be rewarded by gaining an additional – and helpful – staff resource, or the satisfaction of furthering a young person's learning and career.

'We want them to get the maximum value when they come to us. We invest time in them, they invest their time in them [placements], and that's got to be to help them, you know, the whole point of the placement is to give that valuable experience and knowledge to move them forward, to complement the course work they're doing.'

Employer

Before the placement, most employers devoted considerable resources to setting up the placement. Prior to the placement, large employers sometimes had to invest time to 'sell' the placement to other departments or senior leaders. Small employers were particularly concerned about planning placement content to give the learner enough to do over the 40+ days. Employers had to plan desk space and IT resources, which could be difficult for freelancers, but sometimes flexible solutions were found. In an example, a freelancer persuaded the enterprise incubator where she was based to release 3 additional desks at no extra cost for her placement learners. Similarly, a small video production company could accommodate 2 learners on placement, provided they attended on alternate days as there was only 1 free desk.

Once the placement was underway, other cost-generating tasks included inducting, supervising and appraising the learner, creating training resources, and monitoring and amending the learner's work.

The resourcing that employers devoted to the placement varied. 'Highly experienced' employers generally had established processes for working with young people and found the placements less demanding to resource than 'less experienced' employers. This is further discussed in chapter 3. Those with less experience could find the experience resource intensive: for example an employer in this position calculated that 'mentoring' the learner had taken 60 hours, which they saw as a drain on their personal time. Freelancers were particularly concerned about the time taken away from their own work.

The individual learner's capacity also affected the resources the employers had to put in. Employers hoped that the learners would be autonomous and ready to start work. However, some employers perceived the learner(s) to be less 'job ready' or proactive than they had hoped, meaning that they had to devote more of their own time to coach them and to amend their output. For example, the owner-manager of a DJ and events agency underestimated how long it would take to transform the learner into a productive member of staff and found it had an impact on his level of productivity. In contrast, other employers had more positive experiences when the learners became quickly independent and contributed to businesses' outputs. A catering and hospitality employer was delighted when a female learner fitted in quickly amongst her predominantly male colleagues. The employer was impressed by the learner's positive attitude, that she asked relevant questions and '*just got on*' with the tasks she was given.

2.8. Resources and infrastructure: challenges and solutions

Many providers could see the rationale for some external support and coordination on sourcing and brokerage. This could be due to particular challenges of sourcing for specific industries and/or the make-up of some industries, and particularly the prevalence of large or very small organisations. Some providers believed an element of external co-ordination could be useful, particularly in view of anticipated competition among providers. While there was no emerging consensus on these points and how such a function could be provided, ideas include regional level coordination through the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) or informal partnerships through building networks with other local providers. The Department has aimed to support this work by setting arrangements in place with the National Apprenticeship Service.

Coordination on sourcing placements within institutions and combining placement sourcing with apprenticeship sourcing could simplify the process for employers: the same employer liaison teams could approach the employer about the full range of the providers' needs. In an example of this, a provider suggested co-ordinating placements across different courses, with a T Level learner going out to an employer to do the work normally carried out by an apprentice, on the day that the apprentice attends the college.

There was some uncertainty about the level of funding that will be available when T Levels roll out and some concern that staff needed to be supported by systems in leading this work. For these reasons, and to better manage and monitor placements, by the end of the pilot, providers were considering technology-driven solutions and particularly CRM systems. It is likely that several of these will be tested during the CDF phase.

The pilot experiences revealed that placements were resource intensive for employers too – particularly those with limited experience of hosting learners, and for small employers across all routes. This highlighted the need for providers to support employers to have realistic expectations of learners, to achieve a good match between learner and placement and to design appropriate content.

3. Employer engagement and brokerage

This chapter presents the evidence on the experiences of providers and brokers in sourcing and securing industry placements. While much of the brokerage activity was concentrated in the initial months of the pilot, providers and brokerage staff continued to try to source placements for spring and summer placements, and for routes and pathways that had been initially challenging.

The chapter first summarises the approaches to sourcing placements and then presents the approaches that were found in the pilot with regard to effective messaging, setting up the placements and matching employer and learner. Challenges and solutions related to employer engagement with the placements are described at the end of the chapter.

Placement figures

In total, 2,628 learners were in scope for the pilot - which meant they were registered on courses that providers had agreed to source placements for in the pilot, although it was recognised that in the pilot, because it was testing approaches, not all these learners would be placed. In practice, providers and brokers secured placements for 1,551 learners. The number of placements in scope and the proportion achieved for each route are shown in Table 3 below.

The proportions of learners in scope of placements, who went onto start placements varied considerably by route. For example, in the agriculture, environment and animal care route, almost all of the learners in scope gained placements, whereas those sourcing managed to provide placements for far fewer learners in scope in the legal, finance and accounting route. The reasons for non-starting placements included factors unrelated to the placement itself, such as learners dropping out of their course, or provider's internal organisational issues. However, evidence from the qualitative research suggested the variation in learners who started on placement by route also reflected how easy or difficult it was to source appropriate placements for particular routes.

Table 3: Learners in scope and placed

	N. learners in scope	N. learners starting placements	% learners in scope starting placements
Agriculture, environment and animal care	433	419	97%
Business and administration	289	182	63%

	N. learners in scope	N. learners starting placements	% learners in scope starting placements
Catering and hospitality	134	88	66%
Education and Childcare	149	133	89%
Construction	224	98	44%
Creative & design	202	97	48%
Digital	228	80	35%
Engineering and manufacturing	267	117	44%
Hair and beauty	199	106	53%
Health and science	397	200	50%
Legal, finance and accounting	106	31	29%
Total	2,628	1,551	59%

Source: DfE MI, 2018

3.1. Approaches to sourcing placements

Of the 2,628 learners originally in scope for the pilot, around three-quarters were due to have placements sourced by providers, their commissioned broker in the case of the local solutions group and just over a quarter by the national brokerage and support organisation¹². Within the number of placements allotted for providers to source, some providers involved learners in sourcing their own placements.

3.2. Specialist staff

As discussed in chapter 2, staff in a range of job roles supported the sourcing of placements, including work experience/industry placement coordinators, course tutors and curriculum leads. During the pilot, a small number of providers developed or recruited industry or curriculum-specific placement coordinators. This was a reaction to

¹² This figure is based on management information

some of the challenges that generalist industry placement coordinators faced for certain routes and pathways. In an example, in the animal care and management pathway, small, niche employers expected providers to be knowledgeable about their business.

'I can talk the talk when dealing with equine-related employers as I've been working in the equine industry for 25 years, but when conducting a set-up visit at a kennels the owner started talking about different dog breeds and implied that it was embarrassing that I didn't know what I was talking about. People in industry like you to know what you're talking about.'

Work experience coordinator

These providers hoped that by narrowing the focus of newly introduced industry placement coordinators, they would develop a better understanding of industry cultures, norms and working practices, which would enable them to communicate more effectively with employers and establish the most suitable way of involving them in the provision of placements. For example, the practice of many employers in the construction route is to recruit by word-of-mouth. Providers and brokerage staff, and those learners self-sourcing, found these employers placed less reliance on CVs and formal approaches.

Providers indicated that having staff specialise in particular industries worked well.

3.3. Following warm leads

Existing contacts

Providers started the pilot with varying degrees of experience of sourcing and brokering employer placements, and varying established employer relationships in their selected industry routes. Providers found engaging employers with whom they had an established relationship worked well and facilitated a high conversion rate from contact to placement, although these connections alone were insufficient to recruit the volume of placements required. The 'warm leads' they relied upon could be the contacts of the curriculum and other staff, or employers that had supported activities such as curriculum design and technical demonstrations, work experience opportunities or apprenticeships. Generally, providers believed that approaching employers with whom they had an established relationship was effective and most believed they could work effectively across the institution e.g. apprenticeship development teams, to cross-sell and co-ordinate the placements and other work-based training opportunities for learners.

Industry familiarity with work experience and placements

Provider and brokerage staff described the different successes in sourcing placements by route and attributed some of this to industry familiarity with work-based learning

approaches including work experience, apprenticeships and placements. Routes with established traditions included agriculture, environment and animal care, Education and Childcare, health and science and some hair and beauty employers. For these, and other routes in similar situations, work-based learning is seen as an essential part of qualifications as the practical nature of the industry means that certain skills can only be learnt in 'real work' situations. This provided a platform to build on for the pilot. As such, the transition to offering industry placements was relatively straightforward.

In contrast, it was very difficult for providers and brokers to source placements across the legal, finance and accounting route. However, a provider with long standing experience of offering an accounting course with a substantial industry placement element noted that placements were easily sourced through existing contacts, and curriculum leads indicated that the task would have been far harder without pre-established relationships.

However, overall, providers noted that, while employers may be familiar with other work-based learning formats including work experience and apprenticeships, brokerage staff still had to take care to provide detailed information to explain what was different about industry placements (for example, their duration and how they would be monitored through mid and end point reviews) and the forthcoming changes to technical education.

Employer engagement in education

Most employers interviewed for the evaluation had prior experience of hosting young people on work experience i.e. they were warm leads. Their prior experience covered undergraduates, Year 10 and 11 learners, and apprentices. Some had hosted volunteers or been involved with work experience for unemployed adults. This knowledge, along with their agreement to host a pilot placement characterised these employers as 'engaged' early 'innovators'¹³. These 'engaged' 'innovator' employers can be further segmented into:

- **'Highly experienced' employers.** These had previously provided extended work experience of 40+ days for FE learners¹⁴, as well as apprenticeships, part time work or other types of work experience at level 3 and below. For example, a long-term work placement is integral to some level 3 accountancy and childcare qualifications. Some were familiar with using extended work experience to test individuals' suitability for apprenticeship. These 'highly experienced' employers usually had strong existing relationships with their local provider(s) and were concentrated in: agriculture, environment and animal care route; Education and

¹³ G. Moore (1991), Crossing the Chasm; technology adoption life cycle

¹⁴ This was a requirement embedded in existing qualifications

Childcare route; catering and hospitality route; hair and beauty route¹⁵; and less prevalently in the health, sports science¹⁶ and accountancy pathways.

- **‘Moderately experienced’** employers had some experience of offering apprenticeships, work experience and part time work to Level 2 or 3 learners. This group often included employers from construction, engineering and manufacturing, and business and administration routes.
- **‘Less experienced’ employers** were in routes with no tradition of offering Level 2 or 3 apprenticeships, work experience, or entry-level part time work. These tended to be the least ‘pilot-ready’. This included micro and small businesses across all routes, the creative and design, and digital routes, as well as science, legal, and finance pathways. Employers in these industries typically had a preference for graduate entrants.

Self-sourcing

Some providers encouraged learners to source their own placements using their own networks and contacts, for example if they worked part-time in an industry related to their course. While self-sourcing was not widespread, it appeared common in the agricultural, environment and animal care route, Education and Childcare, hair and beauty and - to a lesser degree – in construction, and engineering and manufacturing routes. Provider staff believed that learners who had greater involvement in securing their own placement took more ownership of their placements, and found that self-sourcing gave learners a real taste of the working world and increased their resilience.

Although providers reported that self-sourcing worked well for learners with existing contacts, there were potential issues regarding equality of access to high quality placements from learner sourcing (as was seen in work experience for younger age groups). These result from learners having different extents of social capital to rely upon for sourcing depending on the socio-economic status of their parents/carers, family and friends. Some of the learners interviewed who had self-sourced indicated that they would have liked more support from their provider to help them to identify an employer and set up the placement.

Providers similarly found that learners without industry contacts needed extra support to enable them to self-source, such as a list of employers to contact. In the future, providers proposed more intensive support in the preparation phase to ensure learners are

¹⁵ With the exception of theatrical and media makeup employers, who were predominantly freelancers and had less experience in offering placements.

¹⁶ Sports science route was used in the pilot, but has subsequently been confirmed as an apprenticeship-only route

equipped to make employer contacts, and to monitor their sourcing activity. In addition, where a provider did not have an existing relationship with an employer who had been sourced by a learner, they needed to ensure sufficient resource was available to lead full, first-time due diligence checks in the run up to placements.

3.4. 'Cold calling'

Providers and brokers used 'cold calling' alongside approaches to warm contacts. For example, while sourcing pilot placements, a provider sent emails or 'cold called' new employer contacts, while also reaching out to employers that already provided apprenticeships. The national support provider reported success in using cold calling to source some placements, particularly in the business and administration route. However, generally providers and brokers viewed 'cold calling' as the least successful method of engaging employers, as it had a low hit rate and was time intensive. For instance, a provider used pilot funding to enable their 'Campaign Centre' (a team that usually phoned learners to find out their post-college destinations) to cold call employers. Despite the additional resource, cold calling by non-sales specialists proved to be ineffective, time-consuming and demotivating. Providers also pointed out the shortcomings of using business databases for cold calling, which they related to a lack of local coordination. In geographies where multiple providers operated, employers could be contacted by multiple providers which was off-putting for them and could lead to disengagement. Providers saw increasing risks of this as industry placement activity scaled up to support full T Level roll-out.

Despite the challenges encountered, the pilot generated some lessons about cold calling. When an employer was reached through 'cold calling', on-going contact was required to fulfil their information needs ahead of securing the placement. Expertise in cold calling was also seen to be of value. For example, a provider recruited an 'Employability Coordinator' to cold call employers and to keep in touch with them while a suitable learner was being matched.

3.5. External brokerage support

The national brokerage and support organisation worked with 15 providers (the national support pilot group) with a target to source 700 placements for these providers. Their staff reported that they approached over 10,000 leads to achieve this number of placements. During the pilot, the national brokers refined their placement sourcing methods to work more effectively and strategically. For example, they became more selective in the employers approached, trying to better match employers to courses, and opted for smaller caseloads for brokers recruiting for fewer providers; they also changed the catchment areas, taking into account what was a reasonable distance for learners to

travel. They varied their mode of contact, depending on how industries operate e.g. providing telephone contact for businesses in industries where use of email is limited. They increasingly recognised the importance of keeping employers 'engaged' and were using a '30 days - 10 touches' lead management strategy so that employers were kept 'warm' with regular contact demonstrating their importance to success.

More broadly, the national broker provided a coordination role for large organisations where providers' footprints overlapped, for example placing learners from multiple providers in some of these employers.

3.6. Collaborative sourcing

During the pilot, there was limited evidence of collaboration between providers, although some expressed willingness to collaborate in future – to smooth the process for employers. Others, however, were concerned to maintain their own contacts and could not see a position where they would share employer leads with other local providers. Others still were considering collaboration but were unsure how it could be achieved. Some providers indicated that some national, local or regional coordination would be valuable however this would depend on how far head offices in such employers made decisions about being involved rather than local managers. To support this, the Department worked with the National Apprenticeship Service to take forward a coordination role in the CDF phase.

3.7. Effective messages

Providers and the national brokerage organisation reported using several general messages to try to engage employers with the pilot. Some of these focused on business benefits, whilst others focused on the benefits for learners or for society. These messages were believed to be most effective when they were tailored to the size and/or the industry of the employer. For example, larger employers were reported to be more likely to respond to messages about corporate social responsibility (CSR), whereas smaller organisations were more attracted by having an additional resource available. In addition to provider and broker views, interviews examined employers' motivations for getting involved with the placements and their expectations about the benefits. Typically, their reasons were a blend of business considerations and altruism and mirrored the findings from providers and brokers.

Altruistic messages

The altruistic messages used to engage (large) employers included that the industry placements offered an opportunity to shape the technical education and skills system. In addition, placements provided the chance for young people to gain practical insight into

industries and to improve technical skills supply for the future (addressing skills needs in particular industries). Employers also saw placements as a useful way to feed their diversity initiatives. For example, this was effective in the creative pathway where a sound engineer was keen to support more female learners into the recording industry since he recognised that women were under-represented. In the agriculture, environment and animal care route, brokers found that an ‘opportunity to give something back’ resonated with employers who had participated in longer duration work experience as part of their own career preparation and entry route.

Some employers emphasised that their motivation to help learners was congruent with their wider organisational ethos. For instance, a charity thought the pilot’s aims fitted its own focus on investing in people, while a legal firm thought the pilot chimed well with its own meritocratic approach. In the construction route, large employers also appreciated the contribution to their CSR activities and their reputation amongst customers and communities.

‘We have always been a firm that’s prepared to invest in people, to give people an opportunity to shine.’

Employer

We recognise our responsibilities in the local cities we serve and we want to deliver something back to the community.’

Employer

Business benefit

‘Business benefit’ messaging included that the learner could be the additional resource that learners would offer that could help the employer achieve some non-core goals within the business. This was reported to resonate particularly with employers in industries such as childcare; agriculture; with small employers or small teams, and in organisations operating within limited resources.

Organisations with tight budgets, such as charities or public sector employers, often wanted learners to help their over-stretched teams or make projects more achievable by providing extra resource. For example, a local authority’s marketing and communications department took on learners to help with tasks they did not have time for, such as creating a marketing database. Other organisations, such as catering and hospitality employers, found that an extra person could be useful to handle peak times and could learn a lot about the industry in these periods.

Employers in routes or pathways where job entry is normally at the graduate level sometimes doubted that FE learners could benefit their business. This was true of some

digital, legal, science and engineering employers, for example. More nuanced messages about FE learners' contributions to projects, new ways of working, and filling skills gaps and shortages were sometimes effective for such employers.

Although SMEs with skills shortages were responsive to messages about acquiring valuable skills for their business, freelancers across all routes worried that they would not have enough work for learners needing 40+ days' placements. This was particularly noticeable in the creative and design sector. Brokers and providers had to work hard to convince freelancers of the business benefits of offering a placement. Different delivery modes such as offering a client-commissioned product or service to an SME were successful in securing placements for some learners in the creative route. Providers were able to offer some SMEs a free product delivered by learners such as a corporate video. Some providers thought this delivery model could be adapted in other routes in the future.

Talent pipeline

A general message that worked across industries emphasised that by offering a placement, employers could 'test drive their future workforce', and see how learners responded to the workplace as a form of recruitment pipeline for jobs and apprenticeships. Employers reported that this messaging resonated with them: placements could reduce the risk and cost of hiring unsuitable candidates and potentially gave them access to valuable future talent. In the construction route, messages around creating a talent pipeline and using industry placements acting as a feeder into apprenticeships appealed to many employers and in the words of a science-pathway employer: *'you never know when you're going to find a gem'*.

'The industry placement would be a very good prelude to getting an apprentice in at the end of the industry placement scheme...we could assess the calibre of the workplace candidates with a view to taking them on as apprentices in the summer.'

'It appeals because you can take someone at a fairly raw stage in their development at 16 or 17 who maybe has an idea of what they want to do but it's largely unformed and unfinished, and bring them on board and give them the opportunity to look at what we do, but also hopefully influence and show to them what we can do and what we can offer.'

Employers

The placements were also framed as an opportunity to develop the whole 'talent pipeline', making links and developing the future workforce from Level 3 through to graduate level. Brokers suggested this was more resonant with legal, finance and accounting employers than other messages. Employers provided some potentially

confirmatory evidence; for example, a manager in a large law firm pointed out the scarcity of good candidates for paralegal positions. Similarly, a health employer installed learners as trainee health care assistants, with hopes that they would consider this role following completion of their FE courses.

Selling the industry

Placements could be framed as an opportunity to ‘sell the industry’ and to increase the awareness and understanding of young people about the available roles and types of work. For example, a pharmacy offering a placement hoped to expand learners’ knowledge about the range of work within pharmacies. An employer in the agriculture, land management and production pathway hoped the placement would boost their industry’s reputation amongst prospective future staff.

‘I’m hoping they [learners]’ll stay in the industry as well and look at it [and see] that there is a future. The thing that I really do believe in, one thing I would like to come out of it, is that the big picture of things changes as well, that we have a better recognition... I feel I want to make us an industry look more professional.’

Employer

Opportunities for staff development

Some providers and employers also stressed the opportunity placements could provide for wider staff in the business, in terms of their development (e.g. devising a programme of work, and supervising a young person in their workplace). Placement learners could also add energy to boost staff morale or add a fresh perspective.

‘[Hosting a learner on an industry placement is] something different, it keeps me on the ball and helps me to reflect on why I do things.’

Employer

3.8. Information on the pilot/T levels policy

Employers were generally unaware of the difference between industry placements and other workplace opportunities for young people, and specifically work experience. This sometimes contributed to a reluctance to offer placements. For example, some ‘highly experienced’ employers were reluctant to change their existing mode of engaging with young people, although could be persuaded to trial the new approach.

Practical issues that employers needed to be addressed or advised on pre-placement included the need to have liability insurance to cover the learner, and the potential

burden of learner supervision. Employers also needed advice about the sorts of tasks learners could do.

Nonetheless, the length of the placements was a welcome policy development for many of the employers who were interviewed. They expected that having the learners doing *'live business tasks'* over a longer period would make them more competent and more valuable to their business. For example, a livery stable manager in the animal care and management pathway was delighted that the longer duration would allow their learners to gain stable yard management experience, in addition to animal care, something that had not been possible in shorter placements.

'When we get extended programmes we prefer those purely because it benefits the person who is coming on board a hell of a lot more. No day is ever the same here, so you have to have the routine to gain the experience that you need to do certain tasks. [...] The longer they're here, the better really.'

Employer

3.9. Regional and industry dimensions and solutions

Sourcing a sufficient number of placements of the quality and relevance necessary for the pilot, and for these to be well matched to the pilot learner population, was a significant challenge for providers and the national brokerage organisation. Sourcing placements was more difficult for some routes and pathways than others, but often there were common themes to the challenges that employers in those industries presented, namely: health and safety concerns; availability of roles in the local labour market; fit with their business cycle; prevalence of SMEs and freelancers in the industry and/or local area; and the specialised nature of the roles.

Finding the approaches that work within each route/pathway is crucial – although, tellingly, no single solutions seemingly exist and needs vary considerably and require flexibility on all sides and good communications between providers and employers to ensure that both sides' needs can be met.

Health and safety concerns

Across all routes, it was important for providers and brokerage staff to advise employers – particularly SMEs and other employers that lacked experience in providing industry placements - on safety, insurance and the types of tasks that learners could successfully undertake. Data protection was a concern for employers in the legal pathway and in pharmacy placements in the science pathway in particular. There were several other routes where health and safety concerns were prevalent. In the construction industry these concerned having young people on site. In the engineering and manufacturing

route employers cited health and safety as a key concern when placing learners in their workplaces due to hazardous workplaces and equipment, including legal constraints on the machines that under-18s could use.

Employer size

Across many of the routes, the size of businesses that made up the industry in the providers' local area was influential in how well they could source and match placements. Freelancers, micros and SMEs could face a range of barriers to providing placements.

- **Safeguarding:** providers questioned the appropriateness of placing learners with one-man bands and tended to replicate the position in apprenticeships where this is deemed unsuitable for safeguarding reasons.
- **Productivity:** for the smallest businesses the supervision and overhead costs of hosting a learner were often deemed as too great when compared to the benefits that might result.
- **Contracts:** some freelancers, such as those in theatrical make-up, worked on the basis of short-term contracts. They were unable to guarantee or support work opportunities over a longer duration.

Industries particularly dominated by smaller employers were: creative and design; construction; agriculture; theatrical make-up; and digital. However, freelancers, micro employers and SMEs were represented in all routes and pathways. A range of solutions were tested and lessons were learned.

There was some opportunity to set-up situations for learners to work on client commissioned projects or briefs although balancing this were concerns about the level of employer input they would receive in these opportunities. However, sometimes providers found solutions to enable placements with sole traders to go ahead. For example, a freelancer who normally worked from home came into college to supervise the learner on placement tasks. Another provider was considering setting up a 'creative hub' using cheap local office space for learners to work alongside freelancers to complete their placements.

Unlike SMEs and freelancers, large employers were often better placed to provide placement activities and staff to supervise the learner(s). However, brokerage staff sometimes found it difficult to identify the right person to speak to when sourcing.

The contrasting influences of employer size could also be seen in the legal pathway. Where placements were sourced, providers said that larger law firms provided a better experience than small local firms. In larger firms there was a greater availability of work at a suitable level whereas smaller firms found it more difficult to offer meaningful placements. This suggested that small legal, financial and accounting employers may require additional support to help identify suitable placement activities.

Systematically engaging large national employers was an issue where providers believed there should be some regional or national co-ordination and national oversight. While large employers have the infrastructure and systems that can make accommodating learners on placements and different models far easier, it may take more time for providers and brokerage organisations to find the right gatekeeper in a bigger company. Large employers would welcome support and resources to help them sell placements internally and to help with their CSR messages. The Department has responded to this by extending the remit of the National Apprenticeship Service to provide brokerage support for large national employers, as well as to provide general industry placement support and guidance to all employers.

Local labour market

Regional variation in the presence of relevant employers in the labour market was a significant issue, and particularly for the creative and design, and engineering and manufacturing routes. Where relevant employers were not readily operating in the local labour market, brokers sought to broaden their criteria for recruitment into organisations that would be partially relevant and/or expanded their search areas.

Learners on the creative and design route, for example, often wanted opportunities to practise niche skills, but employers requiring those skills were few, outside London and other major cities. The lack of local labour market opportunities was particularly acute in rural areas. Providers and brokers showed ingenuity in devising flexible solutions to sourcing issues. For example, the national brokerage organisation noted that local authorities often obliged employers that have a local authority contract to offer jobs to local people or to support the local community. Brokers could persuade such employers that offering a placement would enable them to fulfil their contractual obligations. Providers and brokers also recognised the opportunities to find hard-to-source specialist placements within non-specialist employers. Schools and other local authority employers were found to be fruitful sources of digital placements, for example.

Sourcing for the engineering and manufacturing route was predominantly determined by regional variations in the presence of this industry. Some providers reported a 6% success rate in terms of enquiries made to employers. However, there was variation at the pathway level: aeronautic engineering was highlighted by providers and brokers as particularly difficult to source, electrical engineering opportunities were somewhat easier to identify, while garages offered plentiful openings for automotive maintenance and repair.

Understanding the diversity of roles and employers

Some providers started to use industry specialists to gain depth of knowledge about ways of working in the industry (e.g. peaks/troughs in workload, relative concern of health

and safety issues etc.), and tailoring the mode of contact to the ways of working in the sector (e.g. telephone/email). Specialists came to understand more about the demands of the business cycles in different industries.

For example, in the construction industry, providers and employers had to consider the difficulty of predicting work and the fit, for example, of the cycle of builds with learners' skills and availability.

Some providers offering applied science and/or engineering found it difficult to broker relevant placements due to the breadth of careers in the route and the diversity of specialisms covered, in addition to these industries typically demanding graduate level skills; as well as the specific health and safety concerns of employers. In the science pathway, relevant placements were sourced from, for example, pharmacies, laboratories and manufacturing. Balancing this were mixed views of other science placements, notably within pharmacies which for some learners ended up focusing on retail and customer service skills because of concerns around health and safety and data protection concerns meaning the employer was not comfortable with them issuing medicines or dealing with prescriptions.

In the business and administration route, there were a wide array of relevant employers offering business and administration occupations and providers report that placements been relatively easy to source. The employers and job roles found in the pilot included marketing, accounting, forecasting, and Human Resources.

Developing employer relationships

The pilot suggested that employers require multiple small interactions over a period of time, not just at the point of initial recruitment. This requires investing a significant amount of time, and can be challenging where staff have other responsibilities (such as preparing learners), so sufficient resource needs to be put in place to support this.

Several providers discussed that a national awareness raising campaign would support their grassroots brokerage activities by raising understanding and awareness among employers about industry placements.

Lack of entry-level roles

A mismatch between the skills of FE learners and employers expectations could be an issue. For example, employers in the digital industry regularly take in graduate interns and struggled to see how they could productively use FE placements. This was also the case for employers in the engineering and manufacturing route, and prevalent in the legal, finance and accounting route. For this latter route, providers were considering widening their horizons and approaching employers who were likely to have legal

departments as part of their structure; this was influenced by the lessons shared by the national brokerage organisation that tested this approach during the pilot.

Providing an opportunity to trial learners in short 'tester' blocks could also help address large employers' concerns, particularly where these centred on a skills mismatch. A short duration testing period could be persuasive of the contribution FE learners can make and could encourage employers to keep them on for longer.

4. Setting up the placements

Once employers had agreed to provide an industry placement, for some providers in the national support group there followed a handover process of warm employers from national brokerage and support organisation to the provider, and then - for all placements - a process of matching learners to the placements. This chapter explores the processes of handover and of matching learners to placements, however they were sourced.

4.1. Communication and handovers

The national brokerage and support organisation helped providers in the national support group to achieve placement volumes for the pilot. For the large part this process worked well, however, the extra step of handover in the brokerage process did, on occasion, create misunderstandings and miscommunications. For example, providers reflected that there was either a long period of time, or insufficient time, between the handover from the broker organisation until the placement started. Both situations caused challenges: too long and providers needed to keep the employer warm with a risk that they would retract their offer of a placement; too soon and providers lacked time to undertake due diligence checks and detailed learner matching.

For example, a provider reported that the national brokers' lack of knowledge of the local area and travel times by public transport meant that some sourced placements were not suitable. Others reported that employers could have differing expectations of the placements than themselves, for example regarding days of the week, or degree of flexibility that could be embedded. Once the handover had taken place, the role of the work experience co-ordinator was therefore important to maintain contact with employers – to re-confirm their commitment and requirements (e.g. days) and understand what they had been promised (e.g. the level of learner and skills and course content).

The evidence suggested that to ensure placements are appropriate and realistically matched to the learners, both in terms of level and course match, it is important that communications with employers outline course content and the likelihood of flexibility in terms of the placement model. These points need to be raised early during brokerage and re-emphasised as the placements are established.

4.2. Due diligence and setting employers' expectations

Providers noted that due diligence and setting employer expectations were important issues for them to address as placements moved towards being confirmed and matched. The speed at which the pilot was implemented necessitated placements being sourced very rapidly, which impacted on the time available for due diligence and interactions with

employers. The involvement of brokers, as an additional third party in discussions with employers, also affected the time taken for employer liaison. Providers' experiences indicated that employers would engage only in a limited number of meetings pre-placement and it was best to use any meeting to give information as well as undertake due diligence. Where national brokers had already visited employers to give information, providers could encounter reluctance for them to visit to undertake due diligence, which was a critical precursor to placements.

While due diligence should not be minimised, neither should information giving. The evaluation evidence pointed to a need to set employers' expectations of the capabilities of FE learners appropriately and guidance on the nature of tasks that learners can complete in the different industries. Some employers also required input on safeguarding including situations that are/are not appropriate for placement learners. Providers must be assured that employers understand the nature and types of tasks that learners can do. It was important for pilot staff to explain clearly to employers the different requirements of the pilot placements, such as how to set work targets and objectives, how to design content that reflected the curriculum, and how to undertake monitoring and evaluation. Optimally, providers also encouraged employers to help set expectations for work environments during the learner preparation phase. With more lead in time than was available in the pilot, a greater focus on these activities should be possible.

4.3. Matching

How meaningful placements were depended on the match between learners' goals and the employers' business, the range and nature of tasks learners could get involved in, and the support and feedback they received in the workplace. Providers had varied approaches to match learners to placements which were influenced by the amount of elapsed time between the employer expressing interest and the placement start date, employer preferences for having a stake in the recruitment process, and a desire to secure the best 'match' to learners' skills, abilities, and career ambitions. The process also varied between employers, based on the way in which they have wanted to work, which had led to the process varying between and within curriculum areas for the pilot. Accordingly, a range of approaches to the matching process emerged that spanned from no or little learner involvement to a substantial role for learners.

Pragmatic vs. individualised matching approaches

Some work experience coordinators matched learners to placements based on practical aspects such as travel time and location. In other instances, they sought advice from course tutors or curriculum leads in order to match placements and learners. Providers reported that in undertaking that process they considered the learner's skills and abilities as well as commitment to the course; attitude and the likelihood of attending a

placement; and commitment to the technical area in terms of a career choice; as well as their potential ability to manage both the demands of their course and industry placement.

Learners did not necessarily have clear career aspirations which led to some challenges in the matching process. For example, this was seen amongst several learners in the business and management route. There were some instances of placement non-completion where learners did not feel that the activities in their placement related sufficiently to their career interests or course. Given the emphasis on matching within providers' accounts, and the number of them noting lessons to take forward to CDF in this regard, individualised 'matching' of learner to employer was seen as an important determinant of a successful placement. However, providers recognised that, once placements were delivered at scale, it might be hard to achieve individualised matching.

Selection and interviews

Providers' intentions in offering selection and interview approaches were to achieve a better match. They indicated that the expectation for a selection process and interviews was often employer-specific rather than coalescing around particular industries and routes. The inclusion of selection processes tended to reflect employers' desire to have a stake in the placement, potentially indicating their level of expectation as well as commitment to it. It was not always possible to meet this requirement, although some employers anticipated that selection would feature more in the future. Some providers drew contrasts based on practice that emerged in their institutions, for example that employers in construction and hair and beauty were less concerned about this, than those in engineering. Nevertheless, several employers reported during research interviews that a more rigorous matching process would be desirable.

Most employers interviewed were happy for providers to select learners because they did not have time to do it themselves or assumed the provider would know the learners best. However, they often still wanted a vetting meeting with the shortlisted candidate before placement started, to gauge the learner's personality, interests, career goals and organisational fit.

'[I would like to] have a chat with them about what their aspirations are for their career, and get a general overview of their personality.'

'The right individual in the right placement. As much knowledge in advance of what the learner wants to gain from the placement and what they want to develop to.'

Employers

The 'selecting' employers were drawn from a broad range of routes, although several were concentrated in the creative and design route. This might suggest that employers in

this competitive industry with its many sub-specialisms were particularly discerning in searching for a learner with the appropriate skills.

Where learners were required to apply for placements, they needed support, preparation and guidance about how to present themselves and to do this effectively (see Chapter 6).

Some providers questioned whether funding would allow them to continue with recruitment/selection processes as placements roll-out given what they saw as the unsustainable level of resources involved. However, most providers were planning to focus on this more in the future, as they hoped it would underpin higher quality placements.

Active learner roles

Some provider and brokerage staff encouraged learners to take an active role in the matching process. Examples included:

- Providers supplying matched learners with employer contact details in order that learners arranged any (non-selective) interviews or induction days as well as made the arrangements for the main-stage of placement. Providers believed this built rapport between learners and employers as well as commitment on both sides which could improve the quality of the placement. They also noted some problems when learners did not take forward the communication with the employer, and also did not inform the provider that they had not done so. This risked damaging their 'hard won' relationships with employers. For this practice to become effective, learners need sufficient preparation as well as monitoring to ensure they do make the approach as planned.
- Providers using a recruitment process whereby employers exercised an element of choice about which learner to host, and with learners choosing which placement(s) to apply for. According to employers' accounts, the approach varied from learners attending employers' premises to employers coming to the providers on a selected day to lead interviews, either with individuals or groups of learners. Providers using a selection process generally believed that it would produce a greater degree of commitment and motivation from employers and learners, as well as develop the job application skills of the learner. Providers noted that while delivery remains at a small scale, an element of selection is possible, but inevitably results in some learners who want to have a particular placement not securing it.
- The pilot gave providers the opportunity to test whether it was feasible to place all the learners who were 'in scope' within the 11 routes. Some providers chose not to place all learners from 'in scope' courses and generated a limited number of placement opportunities. Due to this, there were often limited implications for

learners in shortlists who were not selected for placements. Where learners were not successful in competing for placements or their placement ended early, some were returned to the full-time college curriculum - an option that will not be available once T Level programmes are implemented. However, some providers were able to offer alternative placements or alternative shortlists to join to those learners who wanted to continue. At a personal level there could be consequences to learners not succeeding at gaining their placement in competitive processes; these could include denting learners' confidence and learners choosing to withdraw from the pilot. This could occur with high achieving students who presented well at interviews where employers' expectations were mismatched to FE skill levels.

Future lessons for matching

There was a hope amongst some providers to involve learners and employers to a greater degree in matching process in future years with an intention that this would boost commitment on both sides and that the placement could be tailored, therefore leading to better quality of experience. This would involve an increased element of learner preparation focused on employability skills including how to handle job interviews and applications, to include CVs being in place early on to feed into matching and encouraging some form of interview or meeting (even if this is not selective) between employer and learner before placement commences. Employers would, in turn, be asked to be specific about the level of skills they are seeking (having been briefed by providers about FE level skills to set expectations appropriately) as well as asked to host induction days, pre placement visits and/or interviews.

For matching purposes, it also implied that all or the majority of placements are available at the same time point; achieving this requires significant lead-in time and a set of well established relationships with employers. When placements came on stream on a drip feed basis, provider staff became aware that learners matched earlier on might have been better suited to placements that became available later in the process.

5. Industry placement models

This chapter explores the models that were introduced as part of the pilot, responses to them and how they developed over time. The merits and drawbacks of the different approaches are considered from the perspective of providers, employers and learners. This provides an overview of how the placement models are considered with regard to timetabling and curriculum, and in workplaces, across different routes and pathways.

5.1. Overview of industry placement models and providers

The pre-pilot consultation led by the Department and the national brokerage and support organisation resulted in a proposal for 3 main placements models for the pilot: day release, block release and mixed. The models were complex, as within each broad category there were sub-categories. This included 1- or 2-day release, single or multiple blocks, and variations according to the term in which placements were due to start and end including whether blocks were completed upfront or at a later stage of the placement.

During the pilot, the providers adapted their models. Initially, around half of the providers were testing a single model across the curriculum areas involved in the pilot, whereas the other half (including 4 of the 6 the local solutions pilot group) were operating a mix of models depending on the curriculum area and predicted ease of placing learners. However, over the course of the pilot, more providers moved to offering mixed models (day release followed by a block(s), or a block followed by day release).

Providers using multiple models based their choices on existing practices and knowledge of how different industries operated, such as seasonal work in agriculture and animal care, and existing experience of offering long-term placements, such as in childcare. Where providers had less experience on which to base their expectations, a steep learning curve emerged.

5.2. Changes to the models

At the outset of the pilot, providers agreed with the Department the models they would test. Their considerations included the fit of the model in respect with curriculum, and brokerage approach. The eventual factors informing the selection of models covered: coursework deadlines; revision sessions; maths and English re-sit classes (in some cases, the pilot has necessitated separate timetables for these subjects); course content delivery; existing commitments such as attendance at events; learner preparation; anticipated employer engagement; and examination periods. These factors then continued to influence delivery.

During the autumn term, providers agreed with the Department some adaptations and flexibilities to their original choices, typically for pragmatic reasons. Additional changes to the models were made that were contrary to policy intentions, such as split placements, as discussed in section 5.3. For example, a few providers permitted learners to undertake 'split placements' of 20 days with one employer and 20 with another. Reasons to change often were a result of the provider's engagement with employers and their recommendations for appropriate placement models, which influenced the ease of sourcing placements, the time this entailed which had the impact of truncating the available time for the placement as well as – to a slightly lesser degree – employer preferences and for reasons of fit with timetables. Appendix 1 shows the final models and pathways at the end of the pilot.

5.3. Responding to employers' requests for flexibility

Changes as pilot delivery progressed included, for example, employers' changing work requirements by season, needing to allow more time for learners to meet coursework deadlines thereby allowing placements to run over holiday periods, and adding block periods towards the end of day release placements to ensure learners would have chance to complete sufficient days. In the creative and design route providers adjusted the models, in order to make the placements more feasible for freelance employers with uncertain workflows, or configured remote working placements. In other routes, including digital, engineering and manufacturing, and legal, finance and accounting, providers, employers and brokers stressed the need for flexibility on models. The flexibilities agreed varied from employer to employer.

Flexibility in timing was particularly important for smaller employers. For example, an agriculture, environment and animal care route employer hosting 3 learners agreed with the provider that each learner would do their placement in a different format, in order to generate enough work for all of them. As part of this arrangement, 1 learner was placed for day release on Saturdays, another undertook day release on Fridays and the other did an initial block followed by a day release. The employer reported that they and the learners were happy with this approach.

Flexibilities

There was both evidence of, and a developing consensus that in future providers would need to offer a range of models to suit the needs of employers in different industries. Providers reported that they intended to trial this in the CDF year with work experience coordinators working more closely with curriculum leads to plan the block element of placements in particular.

Some pilot providers and employers questioned the necessity for a 45+ working days placement with a single employer. By the end of the pilot, there were examples of split placement models, although these did not align with policy. In the creative and design route, which was characterised by micro businesses, employers were unable to accommodate learners for 40 days but were prepared to agree 20 days block placements that fitted into their business cycle and project-based working approach. Learners in the Education and Childcare route spent 2 days a week with different employers. Split placements were also used as a solution for engineering and manufacturing employers who found it difficult to identify suitable tasks because of health and safety restrictions. Similarly, split placements were adopted by small employers in the legal, finance and accounting route, because data confidentiality concerns restricted the duties they could offer learners. However, T Level policy at this point still envisages that placements will be with a single employer.

5.4. Implementing the models

Some providers reported that employers' model preference could vary by the size of organisation with larger organisations more able to accommodate block models, and small organisations showing a strong preference for day release models. Balancing this was the apparent ability of employers to host the model that was offered to them.

When selecting models, providers were informed by whether employers had engaged with similar programmes. Nurseries in the Education and Childcare route and hair salons in the hair and beauty route historically had run work experience using a day release model. However, in the pilot all hair employers were offered the mixed model, so it was not possible to test whether the historical use of day release was preferred by the pilot employers. Employers and learners reported that they liked the day-release element of the mixed model due to a perception that they could practice new skills acquired as part of classroom-based learning in the workplace. The Education and Childcare route was offered as a 2 day release model by 1 provider and as a mixed model by other providers. While day release was familiar and suited employers' ways of working, some Education and Childcare route employers responded well to the block model.

Employers generally perceived that they had not been given much choice in the designated model. However, most still found the model put forward by the provider was workable and cooperated flexibly with providers to accommodate the curriculum and the individual learners¹⁷.

¹⁷ Again, these employers represent those that found the models workable. The non-engaged employers are likely to include more employers that did not find the models workable.

Employers in the catering and hospitality route were responsive to both block and day release models, but prioritised the requirement for learners to be able to work flexibly to meet their need for seasonal, weekend and evening working. This pattern of attendance that involved evening and late shifts had implications for the safeguarding of learners and therefore it was important to clarify the shift patterns and travel commitments with employers and learners during placement sourcing and matching.

More generally, the evaluation findings suggested that employers preferred models that fitted in with demand in their business cycle or supported the completion of tasks during the time available. Providers reported that feedback from employers suggested preferences were driven by seasonal work patterns and the preponderance of weekend and evenings shifts in some industries. This included construction (which can be quiet over winter; agricultural where the harvest period is one of the busiest points of the year; and hospitality, catering and some sports science settings where evening and weekend work is the norm) although, this latter preference raised concerns in respect of learner safeguarding amongst some affected providers.

There were variations in the perceived efficacy of different models between routes but also at pathway level. For example, day release models were judged suitable in health and sports science settings, while block and mixed models had some advantages in science settings. Health employers often welcomed autumn start placements in order to prepare learners ahead of the winter rush. Given the set-up of the pilot and specifically that not all placement models were tested in all contexts, it is not possible to say what worked best in any route or pathway.

Block models

Block release models were perceived by providers to be challenging to operationalise, mainly because of the impacts that blocks had on curricula and assessment timetabling. Particular concerns that providers expressed related to provision of English and maths retakes, which were not only a core outcome required by learners but, as attainment in these subjects is a crucial factor in league table performance, it was also a critical consideration for providers.

In presenting block options to employers, some providers reported that different preferences emerged based on organisation size, with larger organisations seemingly more able to operate block models than smaller ones.

Employers that operated a block model felt this worked well where learners were undertaking a project-based task, since this allowed full immersion and for end-to-end experiences of tasks. This was the case for some employers in the business and administration route, creative and design, digital and health and science, for the latter

employers they felt that learners benefitted from being able to witness patient journeys from beginning to end. Other examples included:

- A university science laboratory (health and science route), where the employer needed the learner to run an experiment over a compressed period i.e. number of days.
- In a school setting (Education and Childcare route), the head teacher noted that a block made it easier for the learner to experience a 'teaching cycle' from the introduction of a class topic to its completion.
- In a pharmacy (health and science route), where the learner was dispensing under supervision, the manager disliked the 1 day release model since they sometimes had to re-train the learner in processes they had forgotten since being trained in previous weeks and thought that a block would embed skills better.
- Again in the health and science route, providers reflected that multiple blocks would allow learners to more easily accommodate part-time work and private study commitments, which in turn would make the placement more 'learner centred'.

Some employers believed that block release models gave learners a more realistic picture of working life and enabling them to decide if they were 'cut out' for a career in that particular industry. However, this is not a one-size-fits-all rule and it is important to emphasise that other employers in those routes preferred day release or mixed models.

Nonetheless, blocks in some industries could be more challenging. For example, providers mentioned that hair salons often have closure days (frequently Mondays) which made full week long blocks unsuitable. There were also peaks and troughs in the business cycle that should be considered. In the construction industry, for example, typically employers were less busy and had less work to offer learners over the winter. The reverse was true for catering employers, who were keen to secure learners over the Christmas and New Year season.

Learners in the agriculture, environment and animal care route who were undertaking a block release model reported that tasks could get repetitive and that the block could interfere with coursework and independent study. Overall the block model could prove quite tiring when combined with college, independent study and in many cases part time work. In terms of what would have improved their placement experience, the learners in the survey would have liked to change the timing and model of their placements¹⁸.

¹⁸ As this was a closed response survey question, learners did not state how they would have liked their model to have changed.

Day release models

There were particular challenges to embedding day release into the curriculum across the routes as some awarding bodies require synoptic assessments in specified periods of the academic year – a challenge that should be minimised within the T Level programmes as they should be designed to accommodate placements alongside curriculum assessments. In addition, the day release model could conflict with timetabling for English and maths GCSEs retakes – both in respect of teaching inputs and examination periods. This was viewed as more problematic. That said, learners of different levels attend these subjects on different days which offered some opportunities to vary placement day(s) for employers.

It was notable that where providers offered a day release model, it did not mean that all learners on a particular course were on placement on the same day(s)¹⁹. This was due to the need to work around employer preferences as well as the maths and English re-sit curriculum. The evidence on this varied, but working in this way appeared to have presented challenges and caused a lot of work in respect of timetabling to minimise disruption to the curriculum. There were indications that timetabling issues were influenced by the lack of lead in time for the pilot. Reassuringly, the providers were confident that, with more lead in time, they could better support this level of variation.

Day release models of a single day per week over 40+ weeks²⁰ appeared as more challenging for providers than 2-day release. This was because it was harder to provide learner preparation at the outset and ensure there were enough weeks in the year to allow the 40 days to be achieved. This was a challenge particular to the pilot and would dissipate as providers using day release anticipate embedding learner preparation in the last term of year 1, once the T Level programmes roll-out.

Many employers across all routes valued the day release model, since they thought a longer calendar period would enable the learners to experience varied tasks and to develop their skills more. For example, an agriculture, land management and production employer who was managing an outdoor attraction pointed out that the learners studying landscape management would benefit from experiencing different tasks during different seasons. In some workplaces, key tasks were only conducted on certain days of the week and employers took care to synchronise the placement so that learners could take on a specific role in those core activities. The majority of employers who used the day release model preferred to have the placement on fixed days to facilitate work planning.

¹⁹ Day release models include 1 day release per week as well as 2 days release per week.

²⁰ The pilot operated 40 day placements although the T Levels intend to embed 45+ day placements

'It's quite good to know that you've got somebody on a particular day on a regular basis, if you know what I mean. It's quite good for, like, if we're doing activities and, you know, we can arrange larger activities if we've got, like, an extra pair of hands. So it is quite good for our planning really.'

Employer

The day release model worked well for employers and in roles where end-to-end experience of tasks can either be achieved within 1 or 2 days or where tasks are repeated sufficiently often to allow an insight into the end-to-end experience to emerge. This was the case for the agriculture, land management and production pathway, Education and Childcare route, catering and hospitality route and the hair and beauty route. For digital placements, providers favoured consecutive 2 days release since it blended the benefits of an immersive experience while also allowing the learner time to engage with the curriculum and theoretical side of their work.

Small employers in particular thought that day release was easier to manage, since costs of supervising learners would be spread out over time, reducing the resultant drop in productivity for staff supervising learners. Employers who used the single day release model sometimes concluded that doing 2 consecutive days would have provided better continuity and more opportunity for learners' skill development.

Mixed models

Mixed models covered a far larger proportion of providers than other models – which may, in itself, form a finding. In addition, more routes/pathways were covered by these models than day or block alone.

Providers saw benefits in a mixed model that allowed for an immersive, induction period at the start of the placement for the learner. This combination of attendance at the workplace was also relatively straightforward for providers to accommodate in their timetables. Where there were issues with timetabling, providers believed the solution would derive from starting work earlier to establish suitable placements for learners and, as a result of this, being able to start the placement for all learners at the specified time.

Providers reported that industries with traditions of day release could accommodate some aspect of blocks with sufficient time and planning. The use of day release in addition to blocks also corresponded with views from providers at the consultation stage, that this would be the most viable model for them.

A provider offering 2 day release placements in the health and science route initially aimed to split their cohort and had half starting the placement in autumn term and the other half in spring term. The first 15 learners did 2 days a week, but for the 15 who started placement in spring, the provider changed to a mixed model, with an initial block

and then 2 days per week, which they felt worked better. The block was found useful to help the learners to get to know the settings, staff, expectations, and built rapport with service users more quickly than was the case with the autumn start learners doing day release.

The mixed model was also popular with many employers across all routes. During the block, the employers would usually lead an induction, often replicating that used with other new starters. Employers noted that the opening block allowed learners 'to get their teeth into' the organisation, allowed them to 'spoon feed' the learners and helped the learner to experience what it was like to work full-time. By the end of the block the learners had reached a 'productive' state, while the subsequent day release allowed them to juggle their placement with their studies. For example, a school science technician taught the learner all safety aspects relating to chemicals they would be using during this initial block, preparing the learner to work 2 days a week thereafter. Employers in the legal pathway and in the digital and the creative and design routes also found the mixed model easy to manage.

Generally mixed and day-release offered advantages for employers, learners and providers, although block models were sometimes preferred when learners were undertaking highly complex tasks over a sustained period of time.

Timings of the placement models

In addition to the mode of attendance, the timing of placements and their commencement in respect of the academic or calendar year was also tested in the pilot.

In some cases timing was determined by the characteristics of the routes and industries. Seasonality in the business cycle appeared to be a particular issue in the agriculture, animal care, placements in the environment industry, construction, catering and hospitality, and hair and beauty industries. Harvest time is particularly busy for agriculture, land management and production pathway employers, while the construction trade is quieter over winter compared to other times of the year. Hair and beauty can experience busy times around Christmas as well as from spring when weddings are more popular. In addition, the hospitality and catering industries can have peaks for similar reasons. In light of this, some providers that trialled spring start placements during the pilot were planning to change to autumn starts.

Where placements commenced in autumn it appeared easier for providers to accommodate them from the perspective of timetabling; where placements commenced in spring they clashed with mock exam periods and were far harder to accommodate. Providers also reported that leaving the block too late, so that it clashed with the main examination period in summer was also problematic.

5.5. Factors underpinning model preferences

While the evaluation data do not enable categorical statements to be made about which models worked best in different industries, they did provide information about why particular models were (or might be) effective. These can be summarised as follows:

- **Agriculture, animal care and the environment.** All 3 models were tested. Some employers preferred learners to be available at busy times such as harvest, and the block or mixed models worked well in this scenario. In some animal care settings such as veterinary practices, employers preferred day release and mixed models because they suited the business cycle and allowed learners to repeat and master activities. Some employers wanted the flexibility to permit evening and weekend working.
- **Business and administration.** Again, all 3 models were tested. Employers who experienced a mixed model often preferred an opening block to cover induction and set the learners' expectations. The block model suited project-based placements, enabling the learners to be fully immersed in the project, from start to end. When project-based work was not the norm, employers sometimes preferred day release as it allowed learners to develop technical skills through repeated tasks.
- **Catering and hospitality.** Day release and mixed models were tested in this route, although most providers used the mixed model. There were no clear employer preferences for specific models. As catering involves similar tasks on any given day, both block and day release models proved workable. However, flexible timings were essential, as employers required learners to work evenings and weekend shifts and to cover the Christmas/New Year and summer peaks.
- **Education and Childcare.** Again, day release and mixed models were tested in this route. Employers were experienced in offering placements and often found day release (on its own or within a mixed model) a familiar and preferred option. It gave them space to reflect on learners' activity, provide feedback and design activity; it also mirrored industry shift patterns and the apprenticeship model. However, a minority of employers found the block model better they felt it gave a realistic picture of physical, 'full-on' work in the industry.
- **Construction.** Block and mixed models were tested in this route, with mixed models being used by most providers. There was no one-size-fits-all model. Day release allowed learners to acquire and practice skills over time, while the mixed model's initial block allowed learners to 'settle in'. Employers preferred day release to be worked over 2 consecutive days to provide continuity. When learners were engaged in complex tasks that required training, block models reduced the need for refresher training. Some employers would prefer learners to do placements during spring and autumn, avoiding winter when less work is available.

- **Creative and design.** All 3 models were tested, but the majority experienced the mixed model which usually proved workable. Project-based work lent itself to blocks, but repeated tasks aligned better with a day release model. Due to the high proportion of micro employers, there was a need for flexible timings and some employers were reluctant to offer placements of more than 20 days. Some micro employers wanted learners' placement to take place on the days they had booked office space. Others had no desk space and commissioned the learners to work on projects while based in college premises.
- **Digital.** Only the mixed and block models were tested²¹. Micro employers were common and this influenced the choice of models. Day release worked well for digital freelancers renting desk space on specific days although some saw the value of an opening block for induction. Employers delivering projects preferred learners to work on a block model, giving the project their full attention and delivering results quickly. However, other small employers found managing learners on a block was too time-consuming. Given the range of employer types in the industry, flexible models were essential.
- **Engineering and manufacturing.** All 3 models were tested in this route. As with other routes, block models were preferred for projects. In contrast, some small employers found the time required to supervise learners on a block reduced their own productivity. Day release worked well when skills could be repeatedly practised and the employer could provide supervisory support 1 or 2 days per week. Where tasks were highly complex, employers felt that a 1 day release model would not give learners enough time to get to grips with tasks.
- **Hair and beauty.** Only mixed models were tested in this route. These worked well and employers could see the benefit of an opening block followed by regular attendance. The day release component of the mixed model was suitable for salons' frequently repeated activities. Some employers would prefer 2 days release, timed to follow classroom sessions so that learners can build links between learning and practice. Employers thought that a block model would be problematic as hair salons often close 1 day a week. Employers appreciated flexible timings to cover evenings and weekends, and the busy Christmas period and spring to summer wedding season.
- **Health and science.** All 3 models were tested in this route, although mixed models were the majority choice. As in other routes, there no clear preferences for a particular model. For example, in the science pathway blocks enabled some learners to contribute to long-running laboratory experiments, but shorter repeated experiments suited the day release model. There were similar contrasts in the health pathway with some employers preferring block models and others

²¹ A provider which had planned to run the day release model added blocks to the placements in order to achieve 40 days' duration.

preferring day release. Flexible timings were important in this route, notably for health employers who wanted learners to be available during the busy winter season.

- **Legal, finance and accounting.** Only mixed models were tested in this route and these were feasible for most employers. However, employers' responses to the models varied greatly, depending on their size and business activities. Some micro employers did not believe blocks were feasible as there was insufficient work for learners over longer periods. Small employers found it too demanding to have learners on site for 2 days, but other employers thought that 2 days was the minimum needed for learners to develop industry insights and hone technical skills.

5.6. Models: challenges and solutions

The pilot did not test every model in each route, but there are indications from the research about lessons that can be drawn with regards to modes of attendance. The convergence towards mixed models has to be noted and accepted, across pathways and routes.

- As a pilot embedded in existing courses, all models placed difficult demands on the timetable and curriculum delivery. Providers expected that they would be able to build in more learner preparation as the placement policy moves forward towards T Level roll out. Moving learner preparation activities to year 1 of a 2-year course would help to reduce some timetabling pressure. In their planning for the CDF year, work experience coordinators were working more closely with curriculum leads to align models and programme delivery so there would be fewer deadline clashes – for example block placements due to take place during exam periods or around UCAS deadlines.
- Day release could accommodate flexible working arrangements such as having office space available only on certain days of the week, or work commitments that were associated with particular days; multiple blocks offered potential solution to the challenge of learners needing to work part-time alongside the contact and independent study time expected for college. Where block-only models were used, the start term was a crucial factor in how well the model worked in pathways/routes; autumn term was seen as the better starting point as it avoided clashes with exam periods although it also implied that brokerage, learner preparation and matching would need to start in the year prior to the industry placement.
- The term in which placements started impacted on employers' availability to host and to support learners through busy periods on placement. Employers would like to get learners up to speed during the autumn term so that they are ready to

support them during peak periods, for example over Christmas and New Year in hair and beauty, and hospitality and catering routes, and also the health pathway. For some roles, including those in the health pathway and in the agriculture, land management and production providers intended to bring forward certain elements of technical training and skills or work with employers to get these in place early on in the academic year so that learners would be ready to start placements – in these example chainsaw operations and moving and handling in the care industry.

- The shift towards mixed and more flexible models reflected both the challenges encountered and solutions reached. There appear few, if any, routes/pathways where a single approach is seen as the best solution. The extent of movement towards mixed models is telling. While this is a pragmatic response to wider issues associated with the pilot, providers also believe these models represent a better compromise between the needs of the curriculum employers, and facilitate a better integration of theory and practice.
- Employers of all types were looking for placement models with more flexibility and responsiveness to their needs. They wanted more notice of placements, and asked for more flexibility in timings, such as allowing split placements of 20 days, or responding to seasonal peaks. Placement duration was a particular concern for small employers, particularly in the creative and design route.

6. Learner preparation and factors affecting their placement experience

This chapter draws together the evidence on the preparation of learners for placements and examines strategies and approaches for learner preparation. It commences with learners' reactions to undertaken placements including initial expectations and challenges, and then turns to the types of preparation they were engaged in.

6.1. Learners' motivations and concerns for placements

Almost all of the learners interviewed for the research had previously undertaken short-term work experience and some expected that they would have to do work experience as part of their Level 3 course. Many were completing courses in subjects where work experience is an established part of vocational training (e.g. hair and beauty, and agriculture, environment and animal care routes, and some health and science pathways). The learners interviewed were generally open to the idea of gaining further experience in the workplace as part of their studies. For some learners, particularly those on animal management courses and health and social care, shorter work experience was already an integral part of their course. Learners with previous work experience welcomed industry placements as an extension of this although some were concerned about the extra time that had to be spent on placement, when combined with their course and part time job commitments.

Learners were keen to have experience to include in their CVs and many knew of the importance that employers in their industry placed on relevant work experience. Some were hopeful that they would get a permanent job or apprenticeship as a result of undertaking the placement. Many learners were excited to be able to spend time in a professional environment.

'I thought that if I could show my initiative and all my skills, and show that I'm a good worker and I get on with anyone, hopefully, they will offer me an apprenticeship.'

Building services engineering learner

In general, the learners' initial concerns about placements centred on the potential impact on their course work and other personal commitments. Some with existing commitments thought that the day release model would fit better as block placements would leave less time for part time work, course work and caring responsibilities. Some learners also discussed their thoughts on the timing of the placement in the academic year. There was no clear consensus about what they thought would work best, though providers and learners acknowledged there were challenges when placements were scheduled for busy

exam or coursework periods. There was a clear need to take account of coursework deadlines and examination periods when deciding about the timing of placements.

6.2. Learner preparation activities focused on employability

The learner preparation that providers devised aimed to develop employability skills and attributes including soft skills, as well as to provide input on route or industry specific issues. These programmes were largely based on existing provision, but additional route-specific preparation was added in some cases, as detailed in section 6.3. The preparation programme offered by the national support organisation was not intended to be route-specific and focused on employment preparation and employability skills and attributes. It also contained an option for a short spell of volunteering. At a broad level, preparation programmes covered similar themes – CV writing, interview preparation, generic employability skills - and providers were confident of covering these requirements using in-house provision in the future.

This focus on employability skills appeared well matched to employers' needs. During the research interviews employers discussed the skills that make individuals 'job-ready'. Typically they focused on soft skills highlighting a positive attitude, being interested in the placement, willingness to learn and good communication skills. Employers wanted learners to show initiative, listen well and communicate clearly. They also recognised that while learners were quiet and shy at first they expected that, with support, the learners would quickly get up to speed.

'We can train anyone to do the job – technical and project management skills are trainable. But they need aptitude and attitude.'

Employer

For some employers, soft skills were an integral part of the core competencies required for industry roles. For example, digital employers suggested that good communications skills were necessary to support networking activities in freelance digital careers and customer service in IT support roles. Similarly, soft skills were integral to many health and education pathway employees' skills. Some employers hoped that providers would do more in the future to prepare learners' soft skills. For example, a health employer thought that the provider could have helped develop learners' social skills more by setting them tasks to complete in their early days on the placement, such as learning new facts about employees.

6.3. Industry specific learner preparation

Reflecting on their experiences during the pilot, providers highlighted the benefits of mapping the skills required during industry placements to learners' preparation and believed the increased lead in time in future would enable this tailoring and integration. Providers either aimed, or intended in the future, to emulate work scenarios in the classroom, for example through role-playing potential responses to real-life situations. Examples of route specific preparation included:

- Within the health pathway, preparation for an elderly care home placement included a mental health nurse providing a college-based input on issues learners would encounter in the workplace (e.g. such as dementia) and how to support patients. In addition, some providers brought forward training on manual handling for this route to include it as part of learner preparation.
- For construction learners, preparation included safety training and CSCS certification to allow access to construction sites.
- Alongside employability inputs and those on health and safety, some providers brought forward training input on technical skills – such as chainsaw operations – for agricultural placements.
- For placements in the Education and Childcare route employers require a DBS check before placements commence hence this was deemed an important part of preparation. However, as obtaining a DBS can take up to 6 weeks, this could make autumn start placements more difficult. This suggests a need to timetable in the DBS clearance processes.
- Industry-specific preparation for catering included teaching learners about wearing the right clothes and being clean and tidy in the kitchen. Some providers used their learner-run restaurants to prepare learners and spoke to chefs to identify what catering skills learners would need to develop more.

Balancing these considerations, the thematic analysis by routes suggested some industries did not require specific technical skills input or tailored preparation beyond employability skills and attributes. This included the business and administration route where placements were highly varied and where generic preparation was sufficient.

The industry-specific learner preparation appeared well matched to employers' needs. Some employers taking part in the interviews noted that in addition to soft skill requirements, they needed learners to come with technical skills. For example, a childcare employer expected learners to understand child development and to have appropriate literacy skills; a tree surgeon wanted to hire learners who knew how to use arboriculture equipment; while a design and print company preferred learners with knowledge of computer-assisted design software. In the case of some small employers,

staff did not have the capacity to teach the learner technical skills and expected the learner to be ready to apply their curriculum knowledge straightaway. Some employers – mainly in the legal pathway, the digital route and amongst some engineering and manufacturing employer - were used to hosting graduate job entrants and interns. Those employers tended to have higher expectations of learners and could be critical of their technical knowledge at the start of the placement. However it was generally the case that, if the learners' soft skills were right, employers were prepared to work with the learner to improve their technical skills.

In some industries, employers additionally required learners to have industry-standard equipment, training or certification to be job-ready. In construction, as noted, learners needed the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card to go 'on site'. Personal protective equipment (PPE) and suitable outdoor clothing were also pre-requisites for construction. In addition, there was a suggestion from a small construction employer that learners should bring their own basic toolkit to the placement, otherwise it would need to be provided by the employer which would be a drain on their resources. In Education and Childcare settings, the need for DBS clearance was highlighted by employers. Learners preparing for work in health settings sometimes benefited from manual handling and/or first aid training. Hygiene training was required for some catering and hospitality placements.

Over time, providers' views strengthened on the importance of employability sessions being embedded within the core curriculum. In an example, a provider moved the employability sessions that would usually be covered in tutorials into a stand-alone 6-week programme for learners on the pilot. This provided opportunities for provider staff to better understand learners' interests and capabilities to assist in the matching process, as well as providing learners with time and encouragement to research the industry, and explore appropriate employability skills. Other providers had a 'general employability' module built into all courses and included (or planned to include) specific 'enrichment activities' to build the industry specific skills employers look for.

The timing of employability programmes was seen as critical, and it was harder to deliver adequate learner preparation support in the autumn term for autumn start placements. In the future, some providers offering this model were considering embedding learner preparation in the final term of year 1.

6.4. Preparation for selection and matching processes

As noted in chapter 4, the process to match learners to employer placements could involve a selection process, sending a CV in advance and/or an introductory meeting with the employer. It was therefore beneficial that learner preparation covered these items. Lessons arose particularly in respect of ensuring that learners developed their CVs at an

early stage during the preparatory phase in order that these were available when employers required them.

To support learners to 'apply' for placements providers included mini-recruitment exercises where possible, including informal interviews, during employability-themed preparation. In addition, it was common to review and provide feedback on draft CVs and support the completion of personal statements or application forms. Providers noted that some learners were able to visit their host employer prior to the placement but timing issues and resources meant that this was not consistent across providers or even within providers. There was a general move towards encouraging learner involvement in matching through pre-placement meetings with their employers to confirm the suitability of the placement on both sides. For example, at a video production company, the employer wanted to interview learners to ensure they were the right 'fit' for the company: open, sociable with a positive attitude. Occasionally employers interviewed on the providers' premises. For instance, a school science technician, a teacher and head of department visited their local provider to interview a science pathway learner accompanied by the placement coordinator.

6.5. Learner preparation support materials

Another successful strategy adopted (or being planned) by some pilot providers was to develop a booklet to help learners identify skills, address questions about their skill-set, and build confidence with certain tasks. This booklet was used pre-placement and could feed into the matching process. Other providers, reflecting on the pilot experience, were considering devising a checklist of potential preparation activities that could include: health and safety training (this would be bespoke to the industry), preparing CVs and as part of this identifying strengths, skills and evidence of work attributes, participating in mock interviews, understanding work cultures and behaviours. Some were also considering if first aid training should be built into preparation activities checklist as well as pre placement meetings with the employer.

Some learners thought that case studies providing details of the activities that previous learners had undertaken in their placements would be a useful early piece of information. Where it was not already done, providers intended to include information about the industry placements in course brochures and information.

6.6. Involving parents or carers

Providers stressed the importance of having parents or carers 'on side' as they could help determine the success of placements. In providers' experience, some parents/carers particularly those in rural and/or deprived areas, struggled to see the value in

placements, and instead were keen to encourage their children to prioritise paid work. As such, it was seen as important to involve parents/carers in early discussions about placements to ensure they understand the benefits and value to learners of undertaking the placement. As part of this it was crucial to provide a rapid response to parents'/carers' enquiries and to make efforts to address their concerns. In order to achieve this, some providers intended to invite parents/carers to information sessions on the industry placement pilot programme, along with learners, which they predicted would be helpful in setting parents' and learners' expectations about upcoming placements and answering their frequently asked questions.

6.7. Learners' views on the preparation

The large majority of learners who responded to the survey said they felt prepared for their placement with 45% saying that they felt prepared and 37% saying they felt very well prepared. The picture was consistent across all routes, although the limited number of survey participants did not enable a detailed comparative analysis by route.

Overall, in the survey, these feelings of being prepared stemmed from a number of sources and learners could list multiple sources of preparation. For example,

- 48% of respondents said that previous relevant work experience was important to feeling prepared
- 56% said the preparation activities supplied by providers were important
- 57% said that their course content was an important factor, and
- 65% said information from their employer was important²².

While it was not possible to report these data quantitatively at the route level, there were indications of some variation in respect of the sources important to learner preparation by route. As such:

- In agriculture, environment and animal care, catering and hospitality, and Education and Childcare commonly mentioned forms of preparation were learners' prior relevant work experience, activities led by the college, course content and information given by employers.
- In business and administration and the creative and design routes, these factors as well as non-relevant work experience were important.

²² As these were closed response survey questions, learners did not state why course content was important or what information from their employer was helpful.

- Additionally, in construction, contacts in the industry and information from family and friends were seen as important. Learners in legal, finance and accounting pathways also saw friends and family as important sources of preparation.
- In engineering and manufacturing, learners emphasised the importance of information for employers about how industry placements differ from apprenticeships and other work experience opportunities.
- Hair and beauty learners stressed the importance of prior, relevant work experience.
- Those in health and science placed more emphasis of the value of knowing someone who had performed a similar role.

On this theme, learners who were interviewed for the research tended to talk about the support they received in applying for the placement, rather than preparation for the workplace. The types of activities they mentioned included classroom- based sessions and tutorials to prepare CVs, undertake mock interviews with provider staff, guidance on how to research the employer, and support in deciding what types of questions the learner should ask during interviews/meetings with employers. Those in receipt of this support said it had been useful, had boosted their confidence in attending an interview, and would also be helpful in applying for future roles. Those that had existing or previous experience in part time work found these preparation activities less useful and would have liked more tailoring to their own experiences.

There were a range of other examples including a creative and design learner with a part time catering job who was offered a placement at a local radio station. He went with a group of other learners to the radio station to meet the manager who explained the daily tasks and what they would like learners to do. As a result he felt well prepared going into the placement. A construction learner, also with a catering job, received help from his tutors to prepare for a job interview in plumbing. He was interviewed by two senior managers who explained the placement duties. This combination of advice and guidance from curriculum staff and the employer helped him to feel confident when he started the placement. As these examples show, learners sometimes received support in preparing for the placement itself and this extra input helped learners to feel more prepared and confident. A few learners also recalled receiving health and safety training beforehand, as appropriate to their industry (detailed in Industry specific learner preparation above). For instance, one construction learner met with an HR representative before his placement, who ran through health and safety procedures involved in electrical installation.

It was notable that in learners' accounts there were very few mentions of industry placement agreements being set up. It is unclear whether learners were not aware of these, did not recognise the term, or if it had not been possible for providers to get both

employer and learner to settle upon the terms of the placement. Some learners who were interviewed talked about wanting their employer to have more information about their courses or for them to know what goals they should be working towards, suggesting that they understood the concept of an industry placement agreement would be useful, even if they did not know such a thing could have been in place for the pilot.

6.8. Learner preparation: key challenges and solutions

The evaluation evidence demonstrated that learner preparation is an important feature of placements practice and that preparation needs to consider soft skills and attributes as well as technical skills. For autumn starts, learner preparation could usefully be covered in the summer of the previous year and revisited in autumn to enable an early start. Spring and summer starts may be better served by preparation in autumn. Most providers did, or were planning to, adapt existing employability programmes for the placements. Booklets and work books were useful accompaniments to this.

Some useful points emerged about tailoring preparation for different routes, beyond generic employability skills. An example of this is the solution of mapping course content and placement in order to prepare learners more fully for the nature of work they will experience. In addition, considering health and safety, and safeguarding issues specific to the industries and placement location is important. Tailoring preparation through using work scenarios was also viewed as effective. Based on experience during the pilot, it may also be salient to re-order technical skills training within the curriculum to ensure learners have the skills employers require before they commence their placements.

Job-readiness and the placement match were of central importance to employers. Providing employers with succinct information upfront about learners' courses and the types of skills and knowledge that are covered can help them plan for the placement. Some employers wanted providers to do more to develop learners' social skills pre placement. More opportunities for employers to meet and vet the learners would also help to ensure the match was right, as well as enable planning of suitable activities.

6.9. Issues associated with learner characteristics

This section highlights equality and diversity issues, including the particular experiences of students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Additional Support Learners (ASL) and those (of) learners who are disadvantaged in other ways. It focuses on preparation and their start in the pilot although these issues had ramifications to later stages of placements too.

There is a need to consider how best to support those young people experiencing mental health issues; this group need employers to be prepared as well as to be prepared to

cope and be resilient at work themselves. Other considerations include learners' part-time work and other commitments that require sensitive handling when placements are matched and models agreed. Finally, the curriculum may need to adapt to ensure learners who need to be supported to achieve maths and English qualifications through retakes. Solutions here may include timetabling that is bespoke to those on placement to ensure they do not miss crucial inputs and assessments.

SEND and ASL learners

According to providers there were very low numbers of SEND learners participating in the pilot. While some providers had a higher prevalence of SEND learners in their cohort than others, they reported it was relatively uncommon to have high support needs SEND learners on Level 3 courses, which made up the majority of courses on the pilot. Where learners had additional support needs, providers reported that they required more preparatory input than others. The focus of this depended upon individual needs, although it was said to be common for these learners to not previously have worked and/or completed work experience. However, providers that *did* provide placements to learners with additional support needs as part of the pilot believed a positive and valuable experience could be achieved.

To secure these placements, work experience coordinators who acted as brokers discussed the particular needs of the learner with employers – to see if they appeared to be accommodating and interested to support more diverse learners. Should any issues arise during a placement the learner and employer were encouraged to speak to the coordinators who attempted to find a solution and bring in the relevant support. In an example of the additional flexibilities that can be offered to these learners, a coordinator and employer agreed an initial series of taster days for an autistic learner, with the learner making short visits to the employer accompanied by their learning support assistant, to build up to the full placement. More generally, providers offered extra monitoring visits, and ensured employer mentors within the workplace were aware of learners' specific needs/requirements. Overall, providers believed that it was possible to secure successful and safe placements for learners with diverse needs, because of employers' willingness to agree extra flexibilities and providers' pre-placement due diligence.

Some learners in the survey or during the research interviews reported that employers had made adjustments or providers had offered additional support for their needs. This included being allowed to take regular, short breaks in the case of a learner with mental health issues. Some employers also noted that they made adjustments – ensuring neuro-diverse learners were aware of quiet spaces and able to take time out of the workplace as needed. A learner with a health condition that had implications for mobility also recounted how their provider had matched them to a placement close to their home, to avoid them having to use public transport which was a source of anxiety. However, there

were also examples where learners believed more could have been done: a learner with a learning disability felt the provider and the employer could have done more to help them balance the requirements of the placement alongside their course work.

Mental health

A challenge across the youth cohort is the large number of learners with anxiety and other mental health issues. There was evidence of providers taking particular care in placing learners who were affected. Many aimed to link these learners to employers with more nurturing ethos to help these learners avoid stress. For example, a tutor selected an employer that provided counselling services as a suitable placement for learner who was emotionally fragile.

Providers noted that the number of learners with mental health support needs has been increasing year on year, and needs are primarily anxiety and depression centred. Many are planning improvements to their own support systems which will in turn feed into placements, and many providers are proud of their existing support provision.

Part-time work

Part-time work is a feature of many learners' lives; while not representative, 45% of learners in the survey noted that they worked in part-time paid jobs. Providers referred to the often problematic interface between part-time work and placements throughout the evaluation, and some of the learners during research interviews also noted that working, while studying and undertaking a placement could be challenging.

Positively, providers reported that learners already in part-time work often required less preparatory input prior to placement since they were more 'job-ready'. In addition, their part-time employers could supply a work reference which could help with industry placement applications. Providers also supported the option of being able to repurpose existing part-time paid jobs into industry placements, where these mapped to learners' field of study, which they did not in all cases (providers said that many of learners work in retail which is an apprenticeship-only route).

Providers' pervading view was that the need to work part-time meant that economically disadvantaged learners' situations could be further challenged by placements. Providers attributed some responsibility for course drop-out, non-commencement of placement and placement non-completion to learners' need to continue in paid jobs. They reported on the importance of ensuring that additional travel and subsistence costs stemming from placements does not put too much financial pressure on these learners. In addition, where learners continued in part-time jobs, considerable care needs to be taken to ensure learners can balance this reasonably alongside their study, placement and other commitments.

Maths and English

Providers had considerable concerns about placements for learners retaking mathematics and English qualifications as part of post-16 study. Providers believed that those most affected are some of the more disadvantaged learners, as well as those for whom English is a second language. They found it challenging to provide adequate preparation for the challenges encountered. Solutions focused on rescheduling the curriculum. For example, at a college operating the block model the provider arranged with employers for learners doing English and maths retakes to have 1 day a week in college to attend revision sessions; this arrangement ran smoothly. However, providers as a whole found that the intensification of the learner experience due to the addition of the placement to existing course work and maths and English sessions was hard to manage. Alternative solutions were considered. During the pilot some providers trialled English and maths tutors visiting the workplace although this was not seen as a sustainable solution. For the future, some providers were considering testing online learning for maths and English. Providers strongly recommended that T Level design should take English and maths retakes into consideration.

Geography

Notably learners taking part in the survey were asked about factors that fed into decision-making about placements. The travel distance to placement was an important factor to 60% of them, and the quality of public transport links was a key factor for 42% of them.

The location of the placements relative to home and the provider location was an important factor for providers. Preparing and enabling learners to travel longer distances as well as funding their travel was a key focus – although some providers reported that some learners were not willing or confident to travel areas that they did not know. As a rule providers tackled individual cases through reimbursements of travel costs (public as well as private transport such as taxis), as well as many employers being able to reimburse travel fares.

Geography had further implications in respect of learners' time, journey length and complexity which had to be factored into preparation. These could serve to increase transport costs as subsidised bus or train passes do not cover peak times and often learners must travel at peak times to arrive at the time expected by employers. For some learners, particularly but not only those in rural areas, this can mean lengthy journeys. Some providers noted that some placements were not accessible by public transport causing further complexity – meaning they could only be considered by learners who had their own transport or whose parents/carers could step in to help with transport.

Economic disadvantage

Threading through the narrative of the pilot was the theme of economic disadvantage and the effects on learners involved in placements. In respect of learner preparation, providers reflecting on the pilot experience identified both the necessity to provide support for travel (navigating the transport system as well as covering the costs); and the need to ensure learners were suitably clothed. Some were aware that while learners could borrow a one-off smart outfit for an interview, they were not in a position to afford smart clothing to attend work regularly and particularly as part of long blocks. In addition, some construction learners did not have suitable outdoor clothing for working on construction sites and parents/carers were not able to afford additional clothing for on-site. There were a few instances of providers using pilot funding to pay for learners' protective/warm clothing and an office outfit. For the future, a few providers were looking to set up relationships with charities to try to better meet the clothing needs of economically disadvantaged learners to enable them to fully engage with the placements. Providers expressed the hope that bursaries would be available in the future for students undertaking placements to support their travel and subsistence costs and to pay for additional equipment or clothing.

Safeguarding

A broader analysis of the evaluation evidence indicated that safeguarding should be a consideration during learner preparation and due diligence with employers. Some learners were exposed to some quite challenging situations in the course of their placements. Positively, there were examples of learner preparation being designed to help young people cope well in challenging situations. This included for example, employer staff such as care home nurses leading aspects of preparation on providers' sites to help set learners' expectations appropriately for what they would encounter.

As part of preparation, there may also be benefits – from safeguarding and health and safety perspectives - to learners being made aware of the sorts of activities that are appropriate for them to be involved in (and those that are not appropriate); they also need to be advised about whom and how to disclose any anxieties concerning the situations they encounter in the workplace.

7. Placement content

The role of placements in advancing learners' technical skills was an important part of the rationale for T Level programmes. This chapter focuses on placement content, exploring concepts and experiences of skills acquisition and development during placements.

7.1. Placement learning and skills development

The relative achievement of technical skills and broader 'soft' skills to support employability were an important feature of placements from providers' perspectives. There were differences among providers about the relative importance of these skill areas, as well as of the varying 'technical' content of placements in different industries. While placements policy focuses on the development of technical skills undoubtedly employability skills and attributes are also developed, however it is intended that this be alongside opportunities learn, apply and hone industry specific technical skills. As the pilot process moved from sourcing and brokering placements to monitoring and reviewing learners on their placements, providers became more convinced that placements presented opportunities for learners to experience things that were not possible in the classroom.

However providers' experiences indicated that restrictions to developing or practising technical skills could be encountered which centred on health and safety and data protection considerations. In an example, a provider reported that an engineering and manufacturing employer said they would need 1 year's notice for the learner to gain experience on a specific machine as non-proficient use of the equipment would lead to a fall in productivity. There were also similar limitations in science placements: in laboratories (where particular access and experiments must remain limited to a small team of approved adults) or in pharmacies (where the risks of issuing incorrect medicines are too great to allow learner involvement to any autonomous degree). Working in agricultural settings brings known risks, although in this industry there is a tradition of work experience and potentially more knowledge about the tasks learners can undertake safely.

7.2. Employers' role in the design of placements

Providers gave examples of highly-motivated employers putting in time to understand the learner and curriculum in order to identify tasks to develop technical skills including civil engineering employers, a health and social care employer who changed their placement to incorporate social work and a small digital employer who supported 3 placement learners to undertake coding, marketing, and account management respectively.

The interviews with employers revealed multiple examples of their engagement to varying degrees in the design of placements and how this led onto to workplace opportunities. Most employers appeared to have been diligent in organising varied tasks for learners in order to give a realistic insight into the workplace. They typically appreciated the need to provide opportunities extend learners' technical skills.

'I just think it's vitally important that you link theory to practice so that you have a knowledgeable doer by the end of the course. The course is useless if it's just theoretical. The whole point of the placement is to give that experience, that valuable experience and knowledge to move them forward, to complement the course work they're doing.'

Employer

Employers had differing approaches to designing the placement content. 'Highly experienced' employers could often slot the learner into clearly defined entry-level activities and were skilled in supporting the learner to develop. For example, catering learners often started their placement on basic tasks such as vegetable preparation before progressing to advanced tasks such as dough-making. Childcare employers involved the learners in nursery playtime and built up to learners playing a greater role in leading sessions. Hair and beauty employers supervised the young people in providing treatments to enable them to become more autonomous in these skills.

Businesses with job roles that could readily be broken down into small component tasks also found it easier to allocate the learners a range of activities. In a small garage in the engineering, manufacturing and process pathway, for example, the owner-manager was pleased to have the learner's assistance in conducting services, safety checks and replacing vehicle parts.

In other routes and pathways, identifying suitable tasks for the learners was more difficult. For example, some creative and design employers had problems both in finding enough work for the full duration of the placement and in earmarking suitable tasks. This was often because learners' technical skills were not yet developed to the degree where they could make a productive contribution. For instance, the manager of a recording studio found it was difficult for learners to make a meaningful contribution since their technical skills did not include expert music engineering skills. Another micro employer commented that he did not have time to teach someone video production and animation. With greater time to match and provide advice on learners' skills, some of these challenges are likely to be overcome.

Legal and financial firms, health and social care employers, charities and HR departments working with business and management learners, and games design businesses in the digital route had other problems in identifying suitable tasks. They were

limited by concerns about sharing confidential data. In a large legal firm, the learners' supervisor was unable to persuade other departments to give learners full access to IT systems because of data issues. 'Live work' sometimes dried up and then she resorted to giving the legal secretary learners exemplar legal documents to 'practise on'. Again, with more time, providers and employers could consider both the restrictions on activities and tasks where FE learners could make a positive contribution, which may mean that these challenges are reduced.

Not all employers had the internal capacity to plan learners' activities systematically. SME employers in particular often needed learners who could 'pitch in' with whatever the business was doing day-to-day. This suggested a need for more tailored preparation, which was likely to emerge as experience amongst employers and providers increased as placements enter the mainstream.

'Because I work by myself the majority of the time, it's very difficult just to say "Oh, it'd be nice, I'll just show you how to do this just because it's nice to", kind of thing. It has to fit in with the business and I did say to college that, you know, I don't have spare time just to do stuff for fun, as it were, so the student has to be prepared to either shadow or pitch in and do what I'm doing at the time for that day.'

'There is not a set curriculum that we have to teach them. Whatever the business is doing, we can get them plugged into that.'

Employers

Some construction, engineering and manufacturing, and health and science, employers found it difficult to identify suitable tasks for learners because of hazardous equipment in the workplace or because health and safety legislation or insurance imposed age restrictions on activities. For example, electrical regulations made it difficult for some construction learners to take part in installation activities. In the health pathway, employers had health and safety and insurance concerns for 16-17 year olds undertaking medical-affiliated and mental health placements. Increased knowledge and experience on what FE learners can achieve will help providers and employers shape placements in the future.

Some employers preferred to allocate their learners larger single projects or individual client accounts to work on. Providers often suggested project-based placements (sometimes undertaken remotely) for digital and creative and design employers, in order to facilitate sourcing. The learners' existing software and coding skills enabled them to undertake projects such as adding advertising to a website, developing a mobile app or designing a media campaign. However these project-based and remote-working placements meant that employers had less opportunity to guide and enhance learners' technical skills. For example, in project-based placements for creative media production

learners in the creative and design route, employers did not supervise the learners' technical skills development and instead spoke about soft skills gained by learners. This was a shortcoming of the solutions commonly used with digital and creative and design placements, and in particular respects these did not meet policy guidance although showed the value of the pilot in highlighting issues for the future, bringing opportunities to further consider how to make these solutions work better on both sides.

Employer size sometimes influenced placement content. Large employers occasionally offered the learner 'rotations' through different departments which could be valuable. For example, the owner of an artist management company created a learning plan covering social media, business management and bookings, administration and finance, and media and public relations (PR). In contrast, small employers could give learners the opportunity to quickly take on more responsible roles. For example, in a small charity, learners took responsibility for social media presence, crowd funding and an eBay shop.

7.3. Accessible and succinct curriculum information

Some employers reported that the provider or broker had not given them a detailed picture of the learners' interests and curriculum. These employers were reliant on the learner to tell them about their studies and capabilities. When learners did not describe their goals and curriculum in detail, some employers struggled to design engaging content. Where placement content did not match to learners' ambitions and goals this appeared to affect their motivation, performance, attendance and completion rates. Many employers indicated that they would appreciate help from providers to identify suitable placement content. Positively, some described having detailed conversations with tutors and/or had completed progress sheets for the provider, specifying activities the learner needed to do which they had found useful in planning placement activities. Employers in this situation indicated that where tutors visited the workplace to observe the learners carrying out tasks, their feedback could be supportive in shaping the placement activities. Employers valued this kind of structured support. There was a call for greater emphasis on this type of support in the future.

7.4. Learners' influence on placement content

While the content of placements was largely determined by the demands of the workplace and opportunities therein, with varying degrees of influence from employers and providers depending on the route, learners could still have some influence in shaping their placements. Those responding to the survey indicated quite high levels of influence: 36% said they had a lot of influence over the types of activities they got involved in; while 42% noted that they had some influence. In contrast, 7% said they had no influence at all, and 15% said they did not have a lot of influence.

7.5. Technical skills utilisation on placement

Examples of technical skills utilisation on placements cited by providers included a science employer who asked the learner to administer surveys on a scientific topic, and motor vehicle learners carrying out servicing tasks for a garage employer. In some instances, employers provided access to technical skills that were not available in the classroom. For example, in a provider, hairdressing curriculum staff noted that course specifications lagged behind industry practice and learners found out about recent changes while on placement. Where learners did not experience new practices themselves, the peer learning in college enabled them to share knowledge of these changes. Staff were able to point to areas of the curriculum where learners were able to achieve at a higher level because of their placement experience. These experiences led some providers to reconsider the ordering of when technical skills are delivered to ensure those necessary for placements are prioritised for early delivery.

Learners taking part in the survey were asked about whether they felt as part of their placement they had gained/further developed technical skills that were relevant to their course, careers and subject areas. Their responses indicated that they had, and they most strongly agreed that they had gained technical skills relevant to their courses (88%), although there were strong majorities believing they had also gained/further developed technical skills relevant to their planned careers (80%) and subject fields (87%) (see table 4).

Table 4: On placement I feel that I gained/further developed technical skills that were:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Relevant to my course	51%	37%	3%	6%	3%
Relevant to my future/ preferred career	51%	29%	8%	9%	4%
Relevant to my subject area/field	49%	38%	5%	5%	-

Values smaller than 5 respondents were excluded to protect individuals' identity.

Source: Industry placement learner survey 2018

Learners' responses to an open question about skills acquisition in the survey indicated that some had highly positive opportunities that had pushed them to achieve. While examples were drawn from particular routes, they were representative of gains across many routes.

'I was constantly quizzed and questioned on my knowledge on different aspects of the {animal care} centre. This pushed me to learn more and really pay attention. It was a constant learning experience even when I was confident in what I was doing.'

'Managing the children's behaviour with effective strategies such as clapping. Meeting children's additional needs and having the awareness of individual education plans. Knowing how to meet their educational needs in the EYFS²³.'

'In the time I spent at [at my employer] I learned how to create various parts of a gas plug and gas chambers and by the end I learned to independently and confidently make a gas plug from scratch and also how to correctly pack and post the correct amount to the customer.'

'I have gained 'support working' skills, enhanced my communication even over the phone, team working skills, IT skills, knowledge of the use of Sage accounting software, problem solving, leadership, organisational skills and knowledge of the kind of industry the business operates.'

Learners in the survey

In the research interviews, learners also described the activities they had completed while on placement and the skills they had gained as a result. Learners who described their technical skill development, spoke of getting quicker at technical tasks due to practice in the workplace, refining skills they had started to learn on their course or being able to use more up-to-date equipment than that offered by their provider. For instance, a learner who had secured a placement in theatrical make-up noted with some enthusiasm that the skills they were learning with the employer were more advanced than those taught on their course at that point. They were working with wigs for the first time, and had previously only worked on natural hair. Other learners undertaking placements in hair and beauty also emphasised the opportunities they had gained to work with new products and technologies on placement. The effect of this had been to make them much quicker and confident in their technical tasks.

Learners studying creative media production also spoke of the technical skills they had continued to develop on placement. While these learners had been placed in technical areas that departed somewhat from their career ambitions (i.e. a learner specialising in games design had been placed with a web design company, while another specialising in TV and Film production was placed with a local radio station), they recognised the transferability of some of the skills they were developing (e.g. the use of particular software packages that were used for video as well as audio editing). The opportunity to

²³ Early Years Foundation Stage

experience other areas of work and the enjoyment both learners had on placement had influenced their future plans: they were now considering working in this technical area in future either as a short-term employment opportunity or long-term career path.

Additionally, learners in engineering placements described tasks such as rewiring, preparing wiring, installing lights and sensors, and learners on business placements described scanning, filing, producing invoices and financial receipts.

7.6. Employability skills and attributes on placements

In addition to technical skills, learners spoke of the employability skills they were developing on placement. This included honing their communication skills, both written and verbal, and the enhancement of their interpersonal skills in the workplace by developing strong working relationships with other staff. Customer service skills were developed through interactions with 'real' customers. A hair and beauty placement learner described how customers at the provider-based training salon had different expectations than customers in the salon where she was placed and as such appreciated the opportunity to practice in a real world situation. Some learners described how their timekeeping had improved as well as other employability skills such as adhering to different dress-codes and workplace appropriate language.

The development of these skills was more heavily emphasised in those placements where these competencies were central to the activities learners were carrying out. This appeared to be more common in some industries including business and administration and health and science settings, for instance, where learners were completing tasks such as sending out company emails and talking to patients in a hospital setting. In these cases, learners believed that they were now able to adopt a greater degree of professionalism in the workplace and had developed social contacts that would assist them in finding employment in future.

Learners in the survey were asked to indicate the soft skill and attitudinal development that had resulted from their placements. They showed strong agreement that all areas had been developed, with highest agreement being shown for ability to work independently (94%), better communication skills (92%) and greater confidence (91%).

Table 5: (Soft skills) On placement I feel that I gained...

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Motivation to do well at college	48%	34%	6%	8%	5%
Greater confidence	56%	36%	4%	3%	
Better communication skills	55%	37%	4%	3%	
Better interpersonal skills	51%	36%	9%	4%	
A positive attitude towards work/employment	51%	37%	5%	5%	
Ability to work as part of a team	58%	32%	4%	3%	3%
Ability to work independently	59%	34%		3%	
Ability to manage my time effectively at work	54%	36%	4%	3%	4%
Knowledge of what the world of work/my employer expects of me	53%	37%	4%	3%	3%
Problem-solving skills	45%	43%	5%	4%	3%
Ability to work under pressure	49%	37%	8%	4%	3%
Commercial awareness (i.e. aim of organisation, and its products and services)	44%	43%	6%	4%	4%

Values smaller than 5 respondents were excluded to protect individuals' identity.

Source: Industry placement learner survey 2018

Their descriptions of how they understood this soft skills and attitudinal improvements to have come about in an open response question indicated some interesting and valuable experiences during the placements. While examples were drawn from particular routes, these exemplified soft skill gains across many routes.

'When under pressure prior to this employment, I used to panic and freeze. Now that I've worked in an environment where service needs to continue happening, it's helped me gain confidence when I'm unsure of what to do.' (Catering)

'I have learned how to behave in a working environment, how to use the equipment needed for the job and that work can be fun if it's something you enjoy.' (Creative and design)

'The main skill that I have gained is confidence and communication skills, which is going to help benefit me in any career I go into whether or not this is linked to the placement.' (Health)

Learners in the survey

7.7. Learners' enjoyment of placement activities

The learners taking part in the survey were broadly positive about the extent to which they had enjoyed the activities they took part in. For example, 56% said they had enjoyed their activities a lot, and 34% said they had enjoyed them to some extent. Balancing this, 3% said they had not enjoyed the activities at all, and 7% noted that they had gained very little enjoyment from their tasks.

Of factors that could be changed to improve their placement experience, the activities on the placement gained most agreement (53%), the placement model (43%) and extent of preparation received (37%). While support from provider (26%) and the employer (21%) when taken together support becomes the second most important factor (37%).

Table 6: Would anything have improved your experience of this placement?

Factors that would improve experience of placements	
The activities you completed while on placement	53%
Changes to when you attend the placement	43%
The level of preparation you received	37%
The level of support you received from the college staff	26%
The level of support you received from the employer staff	21%

Source: Industry placement learner survey (2018)

Their responses to an open response question on this theme indicated what made placements more or less enjoyable. The issues they raised coalesced around some central themes in the evaluation.

- Structured learning experience – positively, some learners believed that skill acquisition in the placement had been progressive and cumulative; negatively, for some, tasks became mundane and repetitive.
- Technical tasks – some learners were pleased with the level of technical tasks they had undertaken and could see clear gains had resulted; others felt their experience did not stretch them and did not cover sufficient range – some of these were frustrated by the health and safety and data protection restrictions on the tasks they could take on
- Balance between placement, coursework and other commitments such as part-time work – on this theme, responses indicated that learners perceived the placement as an additional pressure and did not believe it worked flexibly enough in respect of their coursework. Those in part-time work found this an additional struggle. Some learners felt it was unfair they were not paid for their work.
- Welcoming employer culture – most learners experienced a supportive culture, with a supervisor or mentor they could turn to ask for advice and guidance about tasks. However, a few indicated that they had not experienced a welcoming employer culture, some of which concerned occupational stereotyping. An atypical learner on a construction pathway course stated they were not accepted by other employees because of their gender; another construction learner said they had been subject to name calling and having fun made out of them by employees at the placement. However, most workplaces were much more welcoming. For example, at a hair salon placement, a learner was befriended by a young colleague who helped her settle in. At a hotel restaurant, the learner was pleased that she could seek advice from several chefs.
- Support from provider – this appeared a crucial lynchpin for learners out on placement and many were pleased with the level of support they received. A few however across all routes suggested that more support could have been offered in the form of more regular monitoring and sessions with provider staff. As part of T Level programmes, the connection between curriculum and placement should be stronger because they are designed to interact, which should more naturally lead to discussions of placement content during curriculum sessions alongside more learner-focused monitoring. This, combined with increasing use of CRM systems, may mean learners are more aware of the support offered by providers.

7.8. Lessons on placement content

Overall, there was evidence that many high quality placements had emerged which produced results for employers and learners. Learners were able to identify how placements had developed their soft skills and critically their technical skills. Some highly

experienced employers saw results to the bottom line from placements. 'Less experienced' employers would welcome greater help with overseeing learners' on-going personal development, such as the provision of a personal development plan and providers visiting the workplace to see the learner at work. Good practice emerged from employers being engaged from the outset and putting time into placement design. Learners also had some input. This has shaped the experience from both perspectives.

However specific industries had difficulties relating to placement content. Affected industries included those with high health and safety bars, such as engineering and construction, as well those with data protection bars, such as some science, computing and health settings. This could lead to placements becoming characterised by repetitive low level tasks which eventually learners tired of. Providing employers with increased insight into the skills taught in the curriculum may help focus where learner time can best be spent, however some matters are insurmountable. This includes the long lead of training time needed to operate specific equipment, e.g. in engineering and manufacturing, and health and safety or data protection restrictions. A pragmatic focus on suitable tasks that fit within data and health and safety restrictions is likely to be required to improve placements in future.

Creative, music technology and digital pathways saw different delivery methods trialled, such as remote working or project-based work. Providers and employers reported that learners were generally happy with placement content although some employers did not get what they wanted from project briefs. The extent to which alternative placements offer workplace experience varied, leading to questions on what a successful project might look like, where it does not constitute workplace learning. More work is needed on this, and particularly the mesh between learners working independently while meeting an employer brief. Despite these concerns, given their experiences of brokerage, providers and employers indicated these approaches needed further consideration.

8. On-placement support

While skills acquisition and practice is a key aim for placements, there is a need to provide on-going support to learners and employers to ensure placements stay on track; this forms the theme of this chapter. Action is likely to include monitoring and catch-ups with both parties as well as the role of learning logs in documenting placement experiences. In addition, the placements policy during the pilot envisaged mid and end-point reviews involving learners and employers where understandings of the need varied. This chapter explores how support factored into placement delivery as well as factors such as non-completion.

8.1. The support model and expectations

Once learners were on placement, providers' support activities focused on monitoring often led by work experience coordinators. Coordinators scheduled visits, where possible, to maximise the likelihood of gaining wider feedback (e.g. lunchtimes for construction firms). Many providers kept in contact with employers by telephone, as well as expected tutorial staff to check in with learners on curriculum days. Some staff expressed concern over the time/cost implications of this on top of existing commitments and some coordinators cited difficulties in travelling to placements, particularly in rural areas, though tried to combine visits into clusters to maximise time efficiency. There was a general concern amongst the providers to find suitable CRM systems to support the work needed on placement and this is a priority in planning for the CDF.

Monitoring in the agricultural, environment and animal care route was identified as a key issue within the pilot. The rural and isolated nature of the placements meant that it took a significant amount of time for coordinators to travel to the placements. To overcome this, there was an example of a provider using Skype. In another example, a provider intended to conduct 4 visits to each placement over the course of the pilot, but found that many employers saw this as excessive. Another found that employers were reluctant to engage with any form of evaluation that involves significant paperwork with the solution being to pre fill as much information as possible to reduce the burden. These findings suggested that monitoring approaches need to be aligned to the needs of different industries.

'I can see myself having to do the monitoring visits on the steps of a tractor while the farmer gets on with his day job. Nailing down a time to meet is difficult in itself as farmers are very busy throughout the day.'

Provider

Across a range of curriculum areas, a provider estimated a 'per visit' cost of £100 for each learner. There is growing concern about the affordability of this, and therefore which staff roles should be dedicated to the task. However, there is little question that the activity is needed and therefore providers are enthusiastic to trial new solutions, including those facilitated by technologies including CRM systems.

8.2. Learning logs

As intended by policy, providers advised learners to capture their experience and progress in the form of learner logs. Learners were encouraged to include diary-like input about activities and task they had undertaken. The logs included space for the learner to record information about health and safety inductions, personal protective equipment (PPE), fire assembly, and a report from the employer (which served as the end of placement report).

Some providers did not include an employer report and this meant that they relied on learners' feedback to understand the success of the placement. It is also the case that logs that were otherwise complete sometimes lacked an employer report. Both omissions might have resulted from a lack of follow-up with employers to ensure that these were received. Curriculum leads believed that, because there was no written record, some placement issues might have been missed although their contact with learners as part of the general curriculum reassured them that any issues were limited.

Generally, providers believed learner logs to be beneficial for most learners, helping to identify strengths and areas for development. On occasion, providers noted that learners had been reluctant to complete or engage with the logs, viewing them as an additional burden to college assessments. However, providers believed this will be less of an issue once the logs are an embedded component of the T Level, which would give additional impetus for completion. Whilst in the pilot providers reported that most logs were paper-based forms, some were exploring digitising this aspect for added convenience – considering whether their own managed learning environments (MLE) can become the place where logs are recorded. There were examples of logs being scanned and entered on learners' profile on the MLE.

Many of the learners taking part in interviews recalled using a form of learning log to record different aspects of their industry placement. For many it was mainly used to record and validate the hours of work they had done. Learners had also used the logs to write down the tasks and activities they had undertaken on placement and thought that this was a useful way to remind themselves of what they had achieved over time and would be useful when applying for jobs or writing a new CV. However, some learners reported that this became a repetitive task and so became less of a priority over time, potentially reflecting an issue where their placement was not progressive in terms of

content. There were contrasting views on the format of the logs; some learners suggested the text boxes were too big and were unsure of how to fill them, and others saying the boxes were too small to comment in a meaningful way on their experience. From this, it could be seen that learners needed more direction about what and when to record information and flexibility in the logs to adapt to occasions when more detail was needed – such as when a new task was mastered or at the mid-point review.

These learners were unsure what actions the providers had taken with regard to the learner logs and 1 in particular spoke about their wish for their tutor to read the log more regularly as they had written down thoughts about the placement that were not acted on. In this case the learner was not confident to ask questions during the placement and had written this down in the hope that the tutor would support with ideas about how she could address this. An example of where learners felt well-supported by their provider was where the course arranged weekly group sessions where learners who were part of the pilot could discuss their placements and what they had learnt. They could bring their logs to this session as an aide memoir. This helped to link the placement back to their studies and provide an opportunity to feedback common issues to course tutors.

8.3. Supporting SEND and ALS learners on placement

Providers continued to offer support to SEND learners on placements such as using learner support assistants to accompany them travel to placements and they reported these learners were more likely to be placed where support for their needs could be guaranteed. Ideally, many providers would like to include their own enterprise facilities within placement provision for this group (in some cases for all learners since they claim the equipment and level of skill development they can offer is superior to that found in some workplaces) however, believe that Ofsted and DfE do not make allowance for this.

For those learners with a statement or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan²⁴, it was common that the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) available in the college attended their placement to provide continuity of support. For the pilot, this support appeared to have continued as necessary throughout the pilot but the low numbers of learners with SEND in the pilot mean that it is not possible to say whether this would be expected at full roll-out.

²⁴ See: <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help>

8.4. Placement support materials

Many employers found that the administrative paperwork was a positive feature of the pilot (although a handful of small employers found the form-filling excessive for an organisation of their size). The elements that employers found valuable included placement packs, health and safety forms, the mid- and end-placement reviews, and having a designated contact at the provider.

Some employers suggested helpful additions to the paperwork. Large employers would welcome materials to help them sell the placements internally to senior leaders and other departments, such as an information pack or a one-page briefing. Another suggestion was a pack to 'on board' the learners.

Many employers did not recall signing the pre-industry placement agreement paperwork. However, there was consensus that a clear agreement at the start of the placement about learners', employers' and providers' responsibilities would help clarify everyone's roles and forestall common issues such as learners' poor timekeeping.

Accordingly, some of the learners who were interviewed for the research recalled signing paperwork and health and safety agreements prior to, or at the start of their placement, in a few cases learners also had to sign non-disclosure agreements. Very few learners could recall agreeing learning objectives for the placement as part of a pre-work contract.

8.5. Support to employers

Some employers had experienced excellent and consistent support from providers, while others were more critical. This is exemplified by 1 employer who hosted learners from different providers: 1 provider had been '*exceptional*' to work with, sending the employer weekly emails and making fortnightly calls to check the learner's progress. The other did not provide the employer with a named contact, sent only 1 email during the time of the placement and had not been in contact by telephone. Employers would welcome greater consistency in communications and support.

Support to employers in the lead up to the placement

Many employers wanted providers to be completely frank about what learners could and could do, covering course attendance problems, transport difficulties, maths and English ability, part-time work, family issues, special educational needs or any other issue that could impact on their attendance and commitment while in placement. This group of willing and engaged employers often said they were prepared to accommodate learners who had challenges, provided they knew about any issues in advance and were supported by the provider to make adjustments.

Many employers would have liked more input from the provider on placement content. Many thought that early sight of the learner's curriculum (although not necessarily in granular detail) would be very helpful in understanding the learners' technical skills and assigning placement tasks.

'If we had had greater involvement with the college about the curriculum and what they are learning we could have tied in it a bit more. We've been given no guidance. The only reason we've seen what projects they've got is because I've asked the young people. So it could have been a bit more of a work plan to allocate tasks in line with what they're doing.'

Employer

Many employers thought this should be backed up by a conversation, ideally face to face, with learner and provider staff to discuss curriculum and learners' career goals (if any) and interests. This, employers thought, would help prevent learner disengagement and non-completions (see section 8.9). There were examples of good practice in this area: an employer described being invited to attend a provider event to be introduced to the learner and given information about the pilot. The employer found this useful since it allowed them to become acquainted with the learner and hear about their interests and requirements well before the start of the placement, giving them plenty of time to prepare a suitable programme.

Support to employers during placement

It was common for employers to hear less from the provider once the learner was on placement. The first couple of weeks of the placement could often be a critical point, when both learners and employers could have second thoughts if the match was not right. A suggestion from an employer was to hold a 'mini appraisal' during this period to flag up any early concerns. Another employer had sent the learner and provider their written expectations of behaviour on placement prior to commencement. Employers would also appreciate more tutor visits to the workplace throughout the placement. In an example, an employer noted this could boost learners' confidence as well as giving the employer on-going feedback on what tasks to give the learner, linked to curriculum updates.

'Rather than just speaking to the person that's organising it, like the actual lecturers and stuff [...] having them come out and, like, speak to her [the learner] while she's working rather than just kind of letting her just get on with it...'

Employer

8.6. Sources of learner support

Learners who took part in the survey were asked about who had supported them during their placements. Their responses are shown in Table 7. The most commonly experienced support was received from co-workers (45%) and from provider staff who were not assessors (44%). All forms of support were rated 90% or more in terms of how useful learners perceived them to be.

Table 7: Who has supported you during your placement?

		Utility of support received		
		Very Useful	Useful	Not very useful
Line Manager	34%	58%	34%	8%
Mentor	41%	54%	39%	7%
Co-worker	45%	58%	42%	0%
Another trainee/apprentice/work placement student	28%	42%	50%	9%
College assessor	33%	52%	38%	11%
Another member of staff from your college	44%	42%	50%	9%

Source: Industry placement learner survey (2018)

Employer support for coursework

Learners taking part in the survey were asked whether anyone at their employer had supported them to meet their course requirements. Overall, this sort of support did not appear common, and where it was received, learners indicated that their mentors were most prominent. This support however appeared to be highly valued by learners, no matter who at their employer offered it (Table 8 below).

Table 8: Has anyone at your employer supported you to meet your course requirements?

		Utility of support received		
		Very Useful	Useful	Not very useful
Line Manager	23%	63%	37%	
Mentor	38%	59%	41%	
Co-worker	36%	53%	47%	

		Utility of support received		
Another trainee/ apprentice/work placement student	15%	57%	43%	

Values smaller than 5 respondents were excluded to protect individuals' identity.

Source: Industry placement learner survey (2018)

Quality of learner support

During interviews learners were asked to describe their experience of being supported on placement by employers. They were broadly positive about their experiences. Many indicated that they were working in a supportive environment, with several commenting that they had an individual member of staff (i.e. a supervisor or line manager) they could go to who could assign work, answer any questions they had and provide feedback on the tasks they had completed. Learners described these individuals as being friendly and approachable, and felt confident in raising any issues with the employer as a result. Learners also reported that they appreciated immediate and regular feedback on tasks they had completed and feedback they received during mid and end point reviews.

'It gave me faith in how much [the supervisor/manager on placement] liked me and how pleased they were with what I was doing. Without that, I wouldn't have really known how well I'd fitted in there.'

Learner

In contrast, a learner who was working for a small web design company commented that, while the organisation rented a shared office space, most of the employees worked remotely from home. From their account, this learner did not experience the same close working relationship with staff as other interviewees. A further issue for this learner was that the employer was unable to supply suitable equipment for the placement so they needed to use their own laptop computer to complete the work they were assigned. There were other learners who did not have close immediate supervision or had supervisors and managers who did not assign them enough work to keep them busy. Overall, pilot findings indicated the value of a workplace mentor designated to support the learner and stay connected to their experience.

In addition to a supportive supervisor or line manager, there were some learners, from across different routes and industries that had been provided with training via their placement employer. A few hair and beauty learners had been sent on product-specific training through their placement salons, while some agriculture, environment and animal care learners had achieved certification to use equipment including strimmers and hedge trimmers, and several other learners reported receiving additional health and safety

training in the workplace that enabled them to take on more responsibilities and would be useful when seeking work in the future.

A few learners taking part in the survey provided feedback on additional support they would have liked from their employers. Their responses suggested minor tweaks to arrangements could make a difference including offering opportunities to hear about a range of roles in the company, being matched to a workplace buddy of a similar age and provider staff checking that the placement was delivering the required focus on technical skills. Examples of their comments are shown below.

'I would have liked support from others who work in the business to come and talk to me on what it is like doing their jobs, what they had to get in terms of grades to do that job etc.'

'I would have liked someone around my age to work at the placement so I can feel for confident at the work experience.'

'More input from the college in checking what was being achieved.'

Learners taking part in the survey

Learner views on support from providers

Learners in the survey were asked about the contact they had with their providers while on placement. Most common were provider visits to the employer (62%) although email contact was also relatively common (57%). There was a small number of these learners who had none of these forms of contact (9%). Overall, learners' ratings suggested that all forms of support were useful. The small number receiving contact over social media saw this as useful but the strength of their views was less than seen for other forms of provider contact, with considerable numbers in the group seeing it as useful rather than very useful.

Table 9: What contact have you had with staff from your college while you were on placement?

College staff have:	In receipt	Utility of support received		
		Very Useful	Useful	Not very useful
Visited my employer's premises	62%	57%	35%	7%
Phoned me	41%	46%	47%	7%
Emailed me	57%	49%	43%	8%

		Utility of support received		
Been in touch over social media, e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp	13%	19%	81%	0%
Held meetings with my employer	33%	48%	41%	11%
None of the above	9%			

Source: Industry placement learner survey (2018)

In addition to the contact they had received, learners in the survey were asked about additional forms that would be helpful to their experience. Their responses indicated more frequent, but varied support would be most helpful.

‘Email to check progress.’

‘More visits or meetings to support the whole process.’

Learners taking part in the survey

With regards to the support learners had received on placement from provider staff, learners taking part in the interviews commonly described being contacted by the college remotely (i.e. via email or text) on a regular basis. This was to check how things were progressing on the placement and whether they were encountering any issues. There were also less frequent face-to-face visits. Regardless of the mode of contact, most learners of these said that the support they received from the provider was adequate and could not think of any ways in which it could be improved.

8.7. Learner payments

Whether learners should be paid while on placement featured in the initial consultation and because of the implications to different industries and employers to payment or non-payment, policy has not set guidance on this. However, during the pilot, the payment of learners while on placement led to some tensions and complaints where learners on the same course experienced placements on different payment terms. Providers often preferred learners not to be paid to avoid inequalities although did support subsidies being offered for travel and subsistence costs. However, payment was considered appropriate in some industries, such as agricultural, where employers are said to prefer to recognise learners’ skills, or to reward extra effort or time. Other employers paid learners because of systems requirements, to secure future talent, or to differentiate learners from volunteers.

The Department supplied information collated by the national support organisation on this theme. Based on May 2018 data that covered the national support group of providers, of 435 employers that signed an expression of interest during the pilot:

- 228 employers offered unpaid placements (52%)
- 126 employers offered expenses only (29%)
- 57 employers offered paid placements without covering expenses (13%)
- 22 employers offered paid placements and covered expenses (5%)
- 2 employers preferred to decide about any payment following learner interviews (0.4%).

These data suggest that almost half of the employers approached for the pilot were willing to make some form of financial commitment to the learner.

Learners in the survey indicated that pay was important to a degree – although 50% who responded to this question said this was not applicable to them. Where it was, pay had been a factor they considered when planning their placement for 34% of them, an issue during their placement for 13% and a factor in placement non-completion for 5% of them.

The majority of employers interviewed had decided not to pay the learners because they lacked the resources to do so, although some still opted to cover travel expenses. The few employers who chose to pay the learners had specific rationales for doing so. For example, a hotel paid their learners the minimum wage because they deemed them to be valued members of the kitchen. A bathroom-fitting company paid the learner £10 a day because they thought it would motivate him. Some employers were opposed on principle to unpaid work, or thought that not paying the learner could damage their businesses' reputation. For example, law firms voiced concerns about the legal implications of hiring someone for a long period without pay.

'When he was here we made sure that he was getting paid. I don't like to have people doing work for me and not getting paid for it. So they know they've got a responsibility [...] It is critical that the learner is paid for what they do. You hear of too many learners being basically used as free employment and that disturbs me. Yes they're being trained and that costs money, I understand that, but from the learner's perspective I would feel gutted if I didn't think I was worthy of an income. It's an effort that's worth going through. For their peace of mind and sense of worth.'

Employer

There were indications that deciding to pay the learner could influence employers' decisions about taking part in or continuing with a placement. A few employers said that, if they had been required to pay the learner, they would not have taken part in the pilot.

The owner manager of a garage was paying the learner the minimum wage, but was disappointed by the learner's poor performance; he considered dismissing the learner since he could replace them with a skilled mechanic for just a few pounds more per hour. However, other employers suspected that not paying the learner contributed to the learners being uncommitted to the placement. The evaluation evidence, being largely qualitative, does not permit a firm position to be derived although this is an area for ongoing monitoring as placements roll-out at a larger scale.

8.8. Mid and end-point reviews

During interviews, providers discussed considerations around the mid and end-point reviews which will be required as part of T Level policy. There was some discussion about the purpose of the mid-point reviews and whether they would be expected to cover technical skills, in which case academic assessor staff would need to be deployed, or whether they would capture 'softer' targets in which case support staff could conduct them. The building consensus is that as the reviews currently do not contain an element of work-based assessment they can be conducted by work experience coordinators.

The theme of reviews did not generate much further commentary from providers beyond this which might be because they were seen as a form of monitoring rather than assessment. More guidance on how the industry placement reviews will link to the qualifications within T Levels would help providers make decisions about the allocation of staff to reviews.

The best mechanism to use for the review remains under consideration. For example, a provider who had used Skype to facilitate contact with learners further reflected upon this. Their stated preference was to carry out the mid and end reviews in person in the future and use Skype for monitoring purposes only.

The review process and understanding more about how undertaking the placement was affecting learners generated some further concerns. Predominant amongst these was a negative impact of attending placements in respect of learners' independent study time for completing coursework towards the core curriculum. This had a role in non-completion for affected learners (see section 8.9).

Relatively small numbers of employers recalled taking part in the mid and end placement review meetings with the learner and a provider representative. Where they did, generally they had found the reviews a useful opportunity to feedback formally and frankly to the learner and to discuss progress with the provider. The review forms prompted them to consider the learners' attendance and punctuality, behaviour, social skills and to decide whether they had met or exceeded the employers' expectations. When the learners' scores progressed, the employers appreciated that the review paperwork allowed them

to evidence development. Where the learners' performance was less satisfactory the review meetings were an opportunity to air concerns. In the case of a learner who was habitually late and missed her first block week, an employer used the mid-review to be 'very honest' with the provider about their dissatisfaction with the learner's attendance. This employer was pleased with the provider's responsiveness to the situation. However, in a few cases the promised review visits did not take place and employers felt let down. Where there were on-going issues with learner performance, these employers concluded that the providers had not provided the appropriate support. For the future, more systematic approaches to the reviews are likely to be valuable.

8.9. Placement non-completion

Overall, as part of the pilot around three-quarters of the learners who started a placement went on to complete it i.e. reached the required number of days (in the pilot this was 40+ days). However, there were some differences in how providers recorded their data, which means this figure is approximate.

The rate of completion varied considerably by route with particularly high rates seen in agriculture, environment and animal care, and Education and Childcare and low rates in creative & design and engineering and manufacturing. In some industries rates of completion were higher than some providers perceived. This may be due to data being aggregated across providers, and some struggling despite the overall trend across pilots.

While the data on starts indicated that it was difficult to source placements, the data on completions indicated that this did not affect completion rates. For example, while digital placements proved hard to source, they showed a good level of completion. The data indicated that the picture is complex, but despite sourcing difficulties, placements could still prove a success.

Nonetheless, placement non-start and non-completion emerged as an issue during the pilot, with MI data indicating that just under a quarter of placements were ended before reaching the planned number of days (although to some extent this reflected different practices in recording data, such as counting or not counting placements completed with 2 employers as a success, or recording those where learners moved into an apprenticeship as a non-completion).

The most common reasons for non-completion recorded in the learner MI were not necessarily related to issues associated with the placement. Rather, close to a fifth of learners ending placements early ceased to attend their courses/college which meant they were no longer available to their placement and a further fifth were recorded as leaving for 'other', non-categorised reasons. In addition, just over a tenth indicated that they were not able to manage their part-time jobs alongside their course (including the

placement). There were however large differences between providers, and the MI template supplied to providers offered a limited number of reasons to select from, both of which might have affected how these common factors were reported. While T Levels are unlikely to prevent course drop-out, the curriculum will be designed to better accommodate placements which should reduce conflicts for learners between curriculum, coursework, placements and other commitments.

Providers additionally reported that some placement non-completions could be attributed directly to employers not understanding the technical skills learners hoped to develop. In part this was a facet of the bedding in of the pilot with the limited time for providers to communicate effectively with employers before placements commenced. This included placements where learners were not developing technical skills but only more generic employability skills. Other, non-placement factors occurred where learners believed they were falling behind with course work, or needed to dedicate more time to it to ensure they gained the A Levels and other Level 3 qualifications they needed for University entrance. Similarly, the need to intensify effort on maths and English resits could lead learners to cease placements.

Several of the employers interviewed had experienced a placement non-completion. Employers' comments substantiated some feedback from providers that non-completion could be influenced by learners feeling 'overwhelmed' by juggling the placement with their studies and part time work, factors that should be overcome by the bespoke designed T Level curriculum. However, this could be combined with learners lacking commitment because their placement was not a good match to their career goals or studies, which again might be mitigated by more lead in time to make better matches. Some employers expressed concern and uncertainty about what to do in these circumstances while others surmised that less engaged learners experienced the placement as something they 'had to do', rather than something they were motivated to complete. Where they did not pay learners on placement, some employers considered whether this was a disincentive to completion.

According to some employers, non-completion was preceded by a period of declining attendance by the learner, sometimes combined with the learner appearing demotivated. In response, some employers said they had reduced placement hours or changed the schedule, and allowed learners to do coursework at work which kept some learners on placement. Other employers said that learners suddenly stopped attending. Some, but not all, of these employers contacted providers about the situation. Providers, discussing early leaving from placements, indicated that learners did not necessarily alert them to their decision. A sudden cessation of placement could cause employers inconvenience – for example, 1 commented that the learner's drop-out '*put [him] in a tough spot*' with his finance department, whom he had convinced to get involved in the pilot. Some employers were also concerned about the learner and what had happened to cause their decision to

stop attending. Employers experiencing these situations felt well supported where providers were in touch with them to provide feedback on early leaving and appreciated regular check-ins on attendance. Their feedback indicated that they would welcome clearer and more proactive intervention and communication from providers to manage attendance, poor performance and non-completions. From providers' perspectives, CRM systems would help them better manage relationships with employers at the scale necessary for full roll-out.

A few placements were ceased at the employers' instigation after they had grown unhappy with learners' attendance, work ethic and/or perceived lack of interest in the placement. For example, a hair and beauty employer delivered a verbal warning, with the provider's support, to a learner whose uniform smelt strongly of smoke, which the employer thought was unpleasant for the salon's clientele. The learner's personal hygiene improved, but her attendance declined, leading to cancelled appointments. Eventually, the employer requested the learner to stop attending. However, overall, these situations are rare and are likely to be mitigated by expectations being set earlier on for placements, as well as placements being an integral part of qualifications.

Affected employers often concluded that demotivated learners who struggled with attendance and performance were just not 'job ready'. However, even where placements ended prematurely, most of those employers were not deterred from taking on a learner in the future. For example, an employer in this situation intended to take on 2 learners per year in the future as they believed the longer duration placement delivered significant benefits on both sides: *'We've built something we can hopefully work on in the future'*.

Several employers suggested that it would boost learners' commitment to the placements if learner preparation devoted more time to convincing learners of the benefits of placements – regardless of whether they were heading for higher education, a job, an apprenticeship or did not have a definite destination in mind. They hoped this would feature to a larger degree in learner preparation in the future.

8.10. On placement support: key challenges and solutions

Placement non-completion was an issue during pilot delivery. For the most part, this appeared to relate to a struggle for learners to balance the requirements of study including coursework, independent study and other commitments such as work or caring, with placements. In interpreting this, it must be remembered that placements have been retrofitted into existing qualifications that are not specifically adapted to accommodate them and that in many cases learners were not briefed about the placement requirement ahead of starting their courses. Hence while it was a challenge in the pilot, it may be less of a problem in the future.

Employers and providers showed flexibility in light of issue future solutions focused on scheduling and timing of placements to avoid these problems. It was expected that further solutions would start to emerge once placements become more embedded – this would allow greater lead in time to work with employers and learners to set expectations appropriately. The pilot was useful in identifying these challenges, but due to the short lead in time, it was a struggle to mitigate some of the challenges for employers and learners, especially those learners who needed to undertake paid work alongside study. The pilot has been useful in identifying these issues.

Some employers were more concerned than others about the productivity of individuals during their placement. Some employers wanted providers to be more proactive in monitoring learners' attendance and performance. Signing up to a contract at the start of a placement, followed by more regular communications with providers and more active interventions where placements appear 'at risk' would help allay employers' concerns.

Providers and some employers said that some learners were dismissed from their placements for disciplinary reasons. In some cases, provider staff intervened to try to resolve the issues between learner and employer. However, others were wary of damaging employer relationships. Where early leaving could not be prevented, some providers made attempts to match an alternative learner. Some providers sought to check attendance, which could be a responsibility of staff with pastoral responsibilities. Other providers did not have the processes to check attendance regularly, or shared responsibility with another agency, leading to lack of clarity about attendance. Providers said proactively contacting employers and learners during placement time to regularly check attendance was resource intensive. The introduction of CRM systems was seen as the solution or at least part of it, as providers believed further increases in staff resources were unlikely to be sustainable.

As a consequence of these factors, some providers saw the way forward in reducing placement non-starts and non-completions as better advance communication of the requirement for a placement. Provider solutions included better information, advice and guidance, or more proactive engagement with parents/carers. At the same time, it seems that the negotiation of placements with clear expectations about learning is likely to contribute to lowering the level of non-starts and non-completions in the future. Incentivising learners through issuing certificates of completion (as will be the case in T Levels) was another solution suggested by providers.

9. Perceived impact

Chapter 8 demonstrated the acquisition of technical and soft skills resulting from placements and shows some of the impacts learners perceived to have resulted from their activities in the workplace. Similarly, the employers could see impacts from placements on learner outcomes, as well as benefits to themselves – where placements went well.

Overall, once the data were synthesised, there were few indications that perceived impact varied greatly by route. Moreover, the picture was overall highly positive, where placements represented a good match, were structured, designed to deliver progressive learning over time and to allow insight into the end-to-end process of aspects of work within companies; and could be scheduled to meet both learner and employer needs. These could be deemed critical success factors.

9.1. Employers' view on impact

Employers identified positive impacts, despite the intensive resource required. The majority of those interviewed concluded that they had benefited from taking part in the pilot and were prepared to offer placements again in the future. However, some employers hoped that Government could offer them financial incentive to continue engaging with placements, because they perceived the costs were too high without financial support. Some large employers wanted to be able to use apprenticeship levy funds to support them in this work.

Despite this, many employers felt that their investment in the placement had paid off because they were rewarded by a learner who was willing to learn and work hard. They came away from the experience feeling highly motivated to keep offering placements in the future.

'Working with (the learner) was a pleasurable experience and we got on really well and actually managed to get some real stuff done. It felt like he was a colleague [...] It was a great experience overall and I can't really fault it. If I got the opportunity to employ him I would.'

Employer

The placement had given them an additional resource, which helped the business in various ways. Having an extra person on the team sometimes contributed to raising staff morale and brought a new perspective to the work team. In a few cases, employers detected improvements in productivity. Examples included:

- The owner-manager of a construction company who was pleased that the learner could undertake the manual labour that he was less able to do as he neared retirement.
- A business and management learner impressed his colleagues by willingly tackling a variety of accountancy and office duties.
- An accountancy employer noted that the business was able to deliver jobs quicker because of input of 3 learners who were on placement with them.
- An animal care and management employer found that hosting a placement student meant they were able to look after more dogs.

Employers also found that the placements gave them an insight into skills and talent pipelines. For example, an engineering and manufacturing employer found it interesting to see what the colleges were teaching. The placement gave this employer a better understanding of what to expect from young people they recruit and made it easier for them to plan how to 'bring on' the young people in their workforce.

However, the employer interviews' findings also suggest wide variation in learners' performance on placement. Most routes had a few examples of individual employers reporting less favourable experiences. From these accounts, solutions centred on improved processes for selecting learners and matching them to placements, the content of placements, increased support from providers and improving learners' job-readiness were all likely to be beneficial.

Some employers were disappointed by what they saw as learners' lack of job-readiness and inadequate soft skills. Their most common complaints were related to poor time-keeping and attendance, lack of interest in the placement and general immaturity. Employers often ascribed these shortfalls to the individual learner's personality and lack of life experience. However, as discussed, placement matching, learner preparation and the extent of provider support are also likely to have played a role – and all can be improved in future operations.

'He did come to us totally unprepared really. He still comes to us as a ... child really rather than [an adult]... you see he's nearly 19 so I think some preparation on the course is really needed – what it's like in the workplace and [to] be told, you know, by the college that, you know, you've got to use your own initiative.'

Employer

Less commonly, employers had concerns about learners' technical skills. The development of these could be limited by industry restrictions related to health and safety and/or data protection, but there were also misunderstandings of what a Level 3 learner could offer. For example, some creative and design employers found it hard to identify

content suitable for a level 3 learners' technical skills, and therefore were disappointed in the impact of the placements, both for the business and for the learners. Increased collaboration between providers and employers, as well as a focus on matching, should overcome this.

Employers often found learners who already had experience of the workplace were more job-ready. However, it is important that the provider ensures that the placement still gives the learner opportunities for further skill development and a variety of tasks, as sometimes when learners converted an existing part-time job into a placement employers commented that their skills did not progress very much. The employer interview data suggest that learners can over time become productive and make valuable contribution to the employer's business. To facilitate this, the provider should focus on achieving a good match with the learner, ensuring suitable placement content, carrying out clear and early communications between themselves, the employer and the learner, and consistent support from the provider before and throughout the placement.

9.2. Employers' suggestions for future changes

Most of the employers involved in the interviews were prepared to offer placements in the future. They were keen to see improvements in matching the placement to the learner, setting expectations on both sides, and more support from providers to help when things go wrong.

A handful had decided that because their learner(s) had not performed well (and in some cases the placement was not completed), they would be reluctant to offer a placement in the future. They were apprehensive about the 'gamble' of offering a placement to a learner who might not perform well and who would not provide a return on their staff's time and effort. This suggested renewed effort to build relationships and to gain insight into needs could lead to a more positive disposition to placement. However, most employers were not deterred by their pilot placement experience, good or bad, and expressed an interest in providing future placements.

The prospect of scaling up appeared to be more problematic. Small employers often concluded that they did not have the capacity to increase the number of learners in the future, because their premises were too small or they did not have staff resources to oversee more learners. A few small employers were also looking for greater flexibility around the placement structure and less 'red tape'. They saw the due diligence requirements particularly as unduly bureaucratic.

Larger employers were more positive about scaling up, particularly those who had skills gaps or resourcing. Several pointed out that, were they to increase the number of learners they take on industry placement, it could make the experience they offer less

‘bespoke’. Some employers were also looking for industry or government leadership to achieve scaling up. For example, a hospital employer called for a consultation on placements to check that industries can fulfil the technical education policy. Other employers hoped for government funding to off-set costs incurred in providing placements at scale.

‘We were lucky as I can spend time on getting this right but other businesses might not be able to afford the resources to make it happen. The scale of it is dizzying. Businesses will need to take on cohorts! There may need to be some industry leadership. Employers will definitely need support.’

Employer

9.3. Gains made by learners

In addition to the technical and soft skill gains described by learners (see Chapter 7) they perceived other benefits to the placements. Learners appreciated the opportunities they had on placement to experience things that were not possible in the classroom.

‘It’s experiencing work, as well as learning what said work is doing and why you’re doing it.’

Learner

In some cases, their placement experience had a direct effect on their coursework and exams.

‘I was fortunate enough to, well, say to them “Am I allowed to work with so-and-so because he’s doing testing and I’ve got an exam coming up on testing soon?” and that actually helped me pass my exams, because I’ve got different people for when I have the relevant exams.’

Learner

Learners taking part in the survey indicated that placements had a positive influence on their future plans. For example, 90% agreed that they had gained more information about what it is like to work in their placement industry with learners agreeing most strongly on this factor; 81% agreed they had gained insights into new areas of work, techniques or careers that were of interest to them; and 80% agreed that as a result of their placement they had greater certainty about what they wanted to do after college. Contacts for the future and future employment opportunities were also prevalent gains (71% each).

In addition, 50% of the surveyed learners believed the placement had helped them ‘a lot’ towards achieving their goals, which a further 40% said it had helped some way towards these (see Table 10).

Table 10: On placement I feel that I gained:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Contacts for the future	46%	24%	10%	13%	6%
More information about what it's like to work in this particular industry	57%	33%	4%	3%	3%
Future employment opportunity	47%	24%	11%	12%	6%
Greater certainty about what I want to do after college	47%	33%	10%	7%	3%
Insights into new areas of work/techniques/careers that were of interest to me	45%	35%	8%	8%	5%

Source: Industry placement learner survey (2018)

Examples of wider positive impacts included a Level 3 BTEC Business Studies learner's description of their placement in a window fitting business, which was quite well aligned to their goal to work in sales. The learner had not previously known about the entry-level jobs they would have been able to progress to from college and the placement gave them specific ideas and goals for the future.

Even where some learners had withdrawn from placement before they reached the 40 days, they described how placements still had a positive impact on their skills and outcomes. For example, a health and science learner left a pharmacy placement, but was able to secure a part-time job in a different pharmacy based on the skills and experiences developed while on placement. The employer concerned then offered to recruit the learner to an apprenticeship, which she has taken up.

9.4. Other impacts on learners

Some of the impacts on learners were less positive and concerned with practical issues and arrangements; these link to cross-cutting themes in the evaluation. Both providers and employers were aware and sympathetic about the effects of these impacts on the learners. The main issues discussed by learners during research interviews concerned

the effect of undertaking the placement had on their course work, managing this alongside their part-time working and personal commitments and how this became more pressured at different points in the academic year. For some learners, the addition of the placement to their commitments meant that they had time commitments 6 or 7 days a week. Learners also commented on the travel time and costs required to attend the placement in relation to these issues. While concerning, the effect of retrofitting placements into existing qualifications cannot be ignored. When the curriculum is adapted to fully integrate placements, as part of the T Level programme, these issues are likely to reduce.

Coursework

In the survey, 52% of learners indicated the amount of coursework they needed to complete in the same year as the placement was a consideration for when deciding whether and which placements to take up. For 22% of learners, coursework became an issue during their placement. In addition, 5% attributed the non-completion of their placement to coursework demands.

The most common concern raised by learners during research interviews regarding the time they had to commit to the placement was in relation to their course work, and the difficulties they were finding in finding the right balance. Several learners spoke of how they had a lot of coursework to complete, and struggled to find sufficient time during the working week to dedicate towards it. In the main, this was a feature of the pilot as assignments and deadlines had not been rearranged to take into account the placement models and in some cases only a few members of a class were taking part in the pilot so the expectations were that they would have to catch up with work in their own time. In a small number of cases learners remarked that their grades had fallen – from distinction to merit. However, the learner experience should be better supported within a curriculum designed to accommodate placements.

For some learners, the time it took to travel to and from their placement, and plan and organise this, added to these pressures. A few learners had to study more than previously in evenings and at weekends to catch-up on coursework and revision. Some noted the increasing pressure as they neared their submission deadlines in summer term. Some suggested by a learner that 1 day per week on placement would be more manageable in terms of meeting these competing commitments. These factors require consideration in T Level programme design, although the integral nature of placements to the new qualifications indicates these issues will be addressed.

More positively, some learners were able to identify the benefits of the placement to their coursework. For example, a business learner had been able to use marketing and communications tasks they had undertaken in their placement as an example in their course assignment.

Part-time work

In the survey, 39% of the learners said that they had considered the fit of the placement they were offered with their existing part-time jobs. For 12% part-time jobs were considered to be an issue during placement and for 4% this had led to a decision to not complete their placement.

Several learners taking part in the interviews had part-time working commitments that they had to fit around the placement. Some of these interviewees reported that they had found this process quite easy while they were attending placements on day release. They were able to negotiate alternate days that they could attend the placement or their part-time work to accommodate both. There were some learners for who by continuing their part time job alongside their course and the industry placement, were then working 6-7 days a week and found this to be unsustainable in the long-term. The most common complaint was tiredness. More positively, some learners on the creative and design route had their course assignments moved earlier in the year to anticipate a block placement, but they still had part-time jobs to manage alongside the placement; some were very busy and found this balance difficult. The salience of the placement was a key factor in their determination to persist in this context.

Personal commitments

In the survey, 34% of learners considered how well the placement would sit with their other personal commitments. For 11% this fit (or lack of fit) became an issue during the placement, and 5% attributed non-completion to this issue.

Due to caring responsibilities, a learner who was interviewed was unable to participate in the pilot. They provided care for a family member and did not have sufficient time to attend an industry placement 2 days per week. This indicates that placements need to be flexible and take account of learners' circumstances and commitments. Other learners had more positive experiences of balancing their placement with personal commitments. An applied science learner was initially concerned to discover that her hospital placement would be 40 days long as she had many assignments to complete as part of her BTEC. However, she organised her study time to complete the assignments in the evenings. While she admitted that this was harder, she coped well with her revised schedule and did not feel that doing the placement had negatively impacted the quality of her assignments. In another example, a business and administration learner did his sales placement during the summer term in 10 consecutive blocks of 4 days a week. As he was up-to-date with his coursework and only had 1 last assignment to complete he found it relatively easy to manage his placement alongside his studies.

Travel

The distance that would need to be travelled to placement was a factor when planning the placement for 60% of the surveyed learners and was an issue for 11% of them whilst they were on placements. The quality of local transport links was similar a consideration in placement planning for 42% and became an issue during placement for 13%.

The time required to travel to industry placements could create additional pressures for learners taking part in interviews in terms of their ability to complete coursework or access the placement. This occurred in cases where the travel times were perceived to be lengthy (i.e. over an hour) and/or involved changes of bus/train routes along the way. Some of these learners had stopped attending their placement due to the extensive travel time and potential safeguarding risks of very early or late finishes. Where travel times were shorter and only comprised a single train/bus ride, for instance, learners were generally content with these arrangements and believed they were reasonable. These findings indicate factors that providers should bear in mind when sourcing and matching placements. Positively, most learners were able to have any additional travel costs reimbursed by their provider or employer.

With regard to financial arrangements, some learners indicated that they received some form of payment or coverage of transport costs for the placement. Some were paid an hourly rate, but more described being paid a small honorarium on a daily or weekly basis or as a final gesture. A learner who was paid weekly was able to give up part-time work and focus on the industry placement and his college course. Others were not paid but given vouchers or small gifts at the end of their placement that helped them to feel like they had made a valuable contribution.

10. Concluding thoughts

The evaluation focused on gathering a broad perspective from all involved with the pilot to develop a deep understanding of the different routes and pathways. Alongside the interviews with provider staff, interviews were conducted with national brokerage and support organisation staff covering those leading brokerage and those providing project management support through the national support model. While synthesised in the main body of this report, employer and learner views are reported separately in the sections below to ensure that the different viewpoints are visible.

The pilot provided a series of valuable insights into the likely issues to be faced as placements are operationalised. It has delivered multiple lessons set out throughout the report which can underpin delivery as part of the CDF and beyond. The next challenge is to test the feasibility of the different approaches as the scale of operations increases.

As part of this, sourcing will need to intensify and extend to a wider group of employers. The pilot's lessons on effective messages, employers' support needs for planning and implementing placements and on factors that could prevent non-completion will need to be brought into play. The future solutions that providers were considering also require testing. Critically this includes CRM systems which it is hoped will support monitoring of placements and help keep all parties appraised of developments and issues as placements progress.

There are also lessons centred on learners' experience. Models need to be adaptive so that learners are not deterred from engaging in placements either prior to or following their commencement. Consideration needs to be given to learners' personal commitments including caring and need to work part-time. Travel distance and cost, along with the time entailed, are further factors requiring consideration.

Most critically, both learners and employers require greater pre-placement preparation to ensure there is a good match between their objectives for placements, realistic expectations are set and both sides understand the benefits of the placements and can see the inter-relationship between placements and curriculum.

10.1.Key issues

Throughout the research and in this report, the challenges of the pilot have been highlighted. In parallel, the solutions and lessons for future operation have been drawn out. By the end of the pilot there were continuing issues with delivery that could be associated with the short lead-in time to the start of the pilot which had an impact on delivery of the industry placements both in terms of quantity and quality. Aside from this,

some of the prime challenges and emerging solutions discussed thematically in the report include:

Resources and infrastructure

- Brokerage was a resource intensive activity, whether externally or internally managed. Providers considered their infrastructure and how best to configure this in light of CDF. Most used work experience coordinators, though some considered splitting the brokerage role from the learner preparation and support role. The evidence suggested that starting early is likely to continue to be important given the lead-in times involved.
- Industry placement specialist teams appeared effective, as did roles that shared industry placement pilot activity with other employability roles, such as apprenticeship business development. Utilising staff with teaching responsibilities did not allow the significant time that was needed for brokerage and employer support, along with learner preparation and support. However, curriculum staff played a valuable role in providing insights into curriculum content and also in ensuring placements were matched effectively to learners.
- Employers needed time to ensure their resources were set in place appropriately. Learners required supervision and input which could have consequent effects on productivity. The need to ensure learners had a proper grounding prior to being allowed to work with appropriate supervision meant placements required planning. Employers also needed time to structure the placement content to enable learners to acquire knowledge incrementally.

Employer engagement and brokerage

- The majority of placements were sourced by providers (or the brokers they commissioned), with an external national brokerage organisation supporting recruitment of just over a quarter of planned placements. A 'local solutions' provider already worked with a local brokerage service for other employer work and continued with this arrangement for the pilot. Providers and specialist brokers refined their approach to recruiting host employers during the pilot. Key 'sales' messages from brokerage staff to employers worked best when tailored by size and industry and keeping-in-touch communication was important to keep employers engaged with the pilot. An additional resource on the team was a message appreciated by organisations on tight budgets (e.g. charities and public sector). Those who employed youth labour were persuaded by the chance to 'road test' candidates. Employers with an established talent pipeline (such as through particular types of courses and qualifications) might be motivated by the chance to

‘find a gem’. More broadly and perhaps motivated by their own life experiences, some employers got involved because ‘everyone deserves a chance’.

- Using ‘warm’ employer contacts worked well for providers. They tapped into employers that have experience of hosting apprentices or engaging with the providers for other employability activities.
- Where the external broker developed new employer contacts they found increased success with a more targeted approach, matching learner and employer on more than postcode. This would include the nature of the business, the type of work available as well as the tasks learners would get involved in.
- Many employers welcomed (or would have welcomed) discussion of course content to inform placement activities. Others received written information about the pilot and expectations for the placements which they similarly appreciated.
- Providers said they assessed whether employers might be suitable to host SEND learners in early discussions. They did not systematically ask but drew insights from the nature of conversations they had about the work environment, which if inclusive and accommodating, they would then pursue for SEND learner brokerage.
- Where learners had some involvement with the employers before the placement starts, for example, sourcing the placement themselves, setting up initial meetings or talking over the telephone with them, the learners were perceived to show a greater commitment to the placement. However, the learners needed the skills and tools to be able to do this and support to access the widest possible range of placements, to avoid the learners being limited by ‘who they know’.

Industry placement models

- The pilots evolved from providers having a fixed model that they were testing to providers making use of multiple, mixed models that better suited the practicalities of arranging placements, the needs of employers and learners, and providers’ existing timetables.
- The key message is that ‘one size fits all’ does not work in any route or pathway or type of employer. Balancing that, many employers worked to accommodate the model put forward by providers, if sufficient flexibility was built in.
- Placements that started in spring/summer term allowed more time for sourcing employers, but increased the need for the days in placement to be compacted through a 2-day release model or multiple blocks with day release.

- Providers responded to route/pathway challenges by exploring different model formats and a predominance of mixed models rather than only day or block release.

Routes and pathways

- While lessons by route emerged, no single solutions were established by the pilot. The key message was that adaptability and flexibility alongside good communications helped to ensure that all parties involved had their needs met.
- Routes with a preponderance of small employers and/or project-based working presented greater challenges: employer project briefs, remote working, providing desk-space to freelance employers at providers' premises and funding hot-desk spaces were all trialled as solutions. This included the digital and creative and design routes.
- Routes and pathways with a broad range of occupations and a variety of employment settings proved easier to source. This included business and administration which included occupations embedded in many industry settings. However, in routes with a broad range of different occupations and settings, notably business and administration, it could be hard to achieve an accurate match between learner and employer.
- Pilot funding was used to tackle some route-based challenges, such as lack of transport for learners undertaking unsociable hours in catering and hospitality placements, to provide safety equipment and suitable clothing for learners on construction placements, and pre-placement training in Education and Childcare and health and science.

Learner preparation

- Providers have focused on different areas of learner preparation: general employability skills including job search and interview skills; route-specific technical and soft skills and health and safety preparation; and confidence and motivation.
- While the numbers of learners within the pilot with SEND/ASL are low, employers and providers supported these learners with taster days, and by peripatetic support staff accompanying learners to placements.
- Learners' part-time jobs were a barrier to learners agreeing to start an industry placement and learners completing their placements. Feedback from providers showed that those learners who had part-time jobs were able to demonstrate greater 'job-readiness' in terms of soft skills and behaviours and so might have required less dedicated learner preparation activities. However, balancing part-

time work, the placement and course commitments did lead some learners to feel pressure as well as early leaving from placements.

- Providers were exploring the possibilities of including more learner preparation, earlier on in courses, such as during year 1, so that year 2 can be focused on delivering the placement hours rather than preparation as well.
- Learner reviews were completed using the existing infrastructure, which proved suitable as the reviews are informal. For the longer term, more information might be needed. It is not clear, for example, how the need for middle and end reviews would be met using work experience coordinators.

Delivery and content

- Where placements worked well, learners' technical skills developed through their placement and the learners were able to share these with other learners in the classroom. The findings suggest that the balance of placement content edged towards soft skills rather than technical skills on many placements, in part due to the difficulties in finding suitably-matched placements. However, in some industries particular soft skills are seen as part of the requisite occupational skill set (e.g. networking in digital freelancing).
- On-placement support was most often carried out remotely by provider staff and focussed on the learner rather than systematically including employers. Reviews held at the middle of the placement did not occur consistently across the pilot; providers trialled using technical and non-technical staff to carry out reviews.
- Providers must take care to ensure learners are not disadvantaged by the economic impact of leaving part-time work in order to do a placement, the pressure of juggling the placement with course work and maths and English re-sits, and the time, costs and logistics of organising travel. When providers are able to factor placements in to their T Level programmes the challenges associated with fitting placements into existing courses and timetables should be reduced. More work might be needed to alleviate the costs for economically disadvantaged young people undertaking industry placements in the future.
- Better information, advice and guidance, communication between employers, learners and providers, and closer matching of placement opportunities to the curricula and learners' career goals were all suggested as ways of reducing the extent of non-completion seen in the pilot.

Employer views and experiences

- Analysis of the employer interviews shows that these employers welcomed the opportunity that longer industry placements presented in being able to train

learners to the point that they can become productive members of staff during the placement.

- Echoing the brokerage staff feedback, employers cited messages such as support for their business through an additional resource, developing a new talent pipeline, supporting young people and communities, as being persuasive for them.
- Those engaged employers could make the placement models work in their setting. However, many would have liked more flexibility in the placement timings. Some industry-based preferences for different models came through. For example, in the health pathway (health and science route) employers would have liked learners to have started in the autumn term to be ready for the winter pressure point.
- Employers often wanted input into learner selection or to involve learners in an initial meeting before placement to understand more about the skills, interests and capability. During the pilot this was not always possible due to issues with the timing of handover from brokerage staff. Employers would have liked good early insight into the individual learner for planning and preparation purposes too. This would have involved learners sending a CV in advance and the provider supplying outline information on course content. Employers were typically time poor but were willing to dedicate some time to aligning placement content with curricula and learners' interests if it would ensure a successful placement.
- Where non-completions occurred, it was disappointing for employers. A key message to come through from the employer interviews was that they thought providers should be in contact with them to help explain or manage learners' non-attendance and to re-broker the placement where there is sufficient time.

Learner views and experiences

- Learners were generally positive about the pre-placement support they received, which included help with CVs and interview preparation.
- In some cases, learners did not have much choice in the employer they were matched with, and would have liked more involvement in the decision-making process, through talking about what experience they wanted to gain and how this related to their career ambitions. This further reinforces the value of establishing placements early to enable better matches to learners' ambitions and skills.
- Learners were able to articulate the technical and soft skills that they had practiced and developed on their placements as well as the support they had received from their employer and provider. Overall they believed that the placements were a good opportunity to learn in a professional environment.

Appendix 1

Table 11: Models and pathways at pilot end

Provider name	Pathway
B1: 1 block	Agriculture, Land Management and Production
	Animal Care and Management
	Building Services Engineering
	Engineering, Design, Development and Control
	Health
	IT Support & Services
	Maintenance, Installation and Repair
	Management and Administration
	Media, Broadcast and Production
	Onsite Construction
B2: Multiple blocks	Animal Care and Management
D1: 1 day release	Agriculture, Land Management and Production
	Animal Care and Management
	Engineering, Design, Development and Control
	Health
	Media, Broadcast and Production
	Onsite Construction
D2: 2 day release	Agriculture, Land Management and Production*
	Catering
	Craft and Design
	Education
	Engineering, Design, Development and Control
	Health
	Management and Administration
Mixed, DB: Day(s) first + block (s)	Animal Care and Management
	Craft and Design
	Education
	Engineering Design, Development & Control
	Engineering, Manufacturing & Process

Provider name	Pathway
	Hair, Beauty and Aesthetics
	Health
	IT Support & Services
	Maintenance, Installation & Repair
	Media, Broadcast and Production
	Onsite Construction
	Science
	Software and Applications Design & Development
Mixed, BD: Block (s) first + day (s)	Accounting
	Building Services Engineering
	Catering
	Community Exercise, Fitness and Health**
	Craft and Design
	Education
	Engineering, Design, Development and Control
	Finance
	Hair, Beauty and Aesthetics
	Health
	IT Support & Services
	Legal
	Management and Administration
	Media, Broadcast and Production
	Onsite Construction
	Science
	Software and Applications Design & Development

* 3 day release; the IfA consultation that took place subsequent to the introduction of the pilot led to this pathway becoming apprenticeship-only
Source: DfE 2018



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